

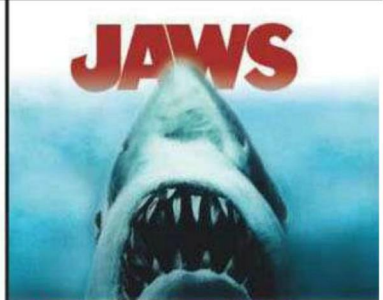
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ROUNDUP
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JAWS



Blu-ray with bite!
Spielberg's classic
looks razor-sharp in
HD – see p120

Supermodel!

Why SIM2's Mico M.150
projector is worth the
£20,000 price tag

**BLONDE
AMBITION**
Will Snow White
& the Huntsman
be magic on
Blu-ray? p15

ON TEST
B&W MT-60D
Sony KDL-46HX753
Onkyo TX-NR515
LG SP820

PLUS:
IS HUMAX'S
YOUVIEW
BOX A TIVO
KILLER?



mico

21st century sound

Datasat brings pro-audio to your home

Sony's 'Smart' AV receiver

STR-DA5700ES rewrites the rulebook

- THE HUNGER
- GAMES
- PROJECT X
- CONTRABAND
- SINGIN' IN THE RAIN



Inside EISA AWARDS 2012–2013: WE CELEBRATE
THE VERY BEST IN HOME CINEMA HARDWARE, p17

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10

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Jaws Blu-ray review, p120



WELCOME

There aren't that many discs which provoke as much giddy excitement at HCC as Universal's *Jaws* Blu-ray.

When this particular platter arrived in the post, it created a frantic scramble to see who would get to

take it home first. And for good reason. **Jaws is a movie that everyone loves, and the chance to see it in hi-def glory is too good to miss.**



Yet Spielberg's sea-bound thriller is just the beginning of a triumphant Blu-ray schedule that finally fulfils the potential of the platform. Before the end of the year, home cinema fans will be able to pick up the 50th Anniversary James Bond box set, David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia*, the original Indiana Jones trilogy, a fourteen-film Alfred Hitchcock anthology, Universal's Classic Monsters collection and, at last, *Short Circuit...*

We've waited patiently for these titles to appear – now is the time to treat ourselves. The rest of 2012 is gonna be good!

Editor

Mark Craven



MENU

WANT MORE?
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for even more news
and reviews

BULLETIN

The place for hot products, trends and technology. Starts... p7

07 Great Dane

Artcoustic takes the wraps off its new high-output dedicated centre speaker

08 Full-bodied flatscreen

Bose shows off its second-generation VideoWave 'home entertainment' system

COVER STORY

09 'A great moment in UK TV'

Lord Sugar celebrates the long-awaited launch of the YouView platform

10 AV heroes help hospices

How a UK charity drive is bringing home theatre to children with short lives

12 Harvard comes of age

View21 set-top box showcases a mix of Smart functionality and inventive apps

15 Grimm tidings

Fantasy epic *Snow White & The Huntsman* gets ready to wage war on BD and DVD

FEATURES

In-depth interviews and special reports. Starts... p17

COVER STORY

56 Unleashing the sound of tomorrow's cinema

We lift the lid on cinema audio pioneer Datasat Digital Entertainment and its new RS20i high-end home processor

60 Eastern Promises

Take a tour of this high-end 3D home cinema in Dubai

REGULARS

65 Digital copy

Mark Craven discovers that our European neighbours share our passion for AV tech

66 Film fanatic

The Beek reveals why being paid to watch Blu-rays can be surprisingly stressful

114 Finishing touches

We round up the latest AV accessories, including Edifier's nautical-styled Spinnaker loudspeakers

130 Point of view

Richard Stevenson hopes that AV receiver manufacturers are as excited as he is about Dolby's new cinema sound format

45 High-End Hero: SIM2 Mico M.150

We get to grips with the world's first Active Shutter 3D LED projector



17



EISA Awards 2012-2013

Your guide to the winning home entertainment technology from this year's European Imaging & Sound Association Awards...

You're gonna need a bigger TV

p51

With *Jaws* hitting Blu-ray this month, we investigate the production of the film that changed the face of Hollywood forever

42 Subscribe!

Sign up to the world's best AV magazine and get a copy of the hit thriller *Drive* on Blu-ray



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PLAYBACK

HCC's software expert casts a critical eye over the latest Blu-rays, DVDs and videogames. Starts... p119

- | | |
|--|--|
| 120 Jaws | Wallander: Series Three |
| 121 Headhunters | Cinderella: Diamond Edition |
| Project X: Extended Cut | 101 Dalmatians |
| Contraband | 125 The Pirates! In an Adventures with Scientists in 3D |
| The Rave | 126 Ghost Stories: Classic Adaptations from the BBC – Volumes 1 & 2 |
| 122 The Hunger Games: 2 Disc Unseen Version | I Am Bruce Lee |
| 123 Singin' in the Rain | Rumble Fish |
| Truth or Dare | The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie |
| Starship Troopers: Invasion | The Night Porter |
| Hit & Miss | |
| Blade II | |
| 124 The Amazing Spider-Man | |
| Brave | |
| Boardwalk Empire: Season Two | |



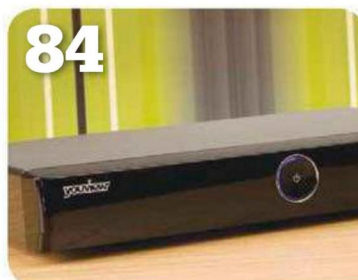
Pirate of the apes? p125



76



80



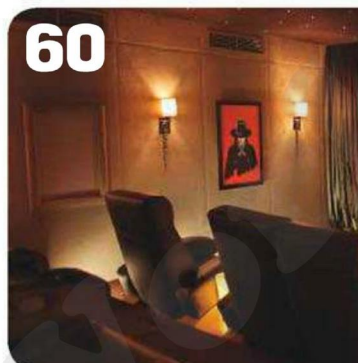
84



86



96



60

REVIEWS

With a focus on performance, these are in-depth tests you can trust... p75

76 Sony STR-DA5700

Imaginatively specified AV receiver rewrites the rulebook with its Smart functionality

80 Bowers & Wilkins MT60

This revised 'Mini Theatre' 5.1 speaker package is a real acoustic all-rounder

84 Humax DTR-1000

It may be two years late, but this debut YouView PVR was worth the wait

86 Sony KDL-46HX753

Is this 46in 3D LED TV the best-value model in Sony's current line-up?

90 Samsung UE40EH5300

Don't care about 3D? Then check out this affordable 40in Smart LED LCD TV

92 Onkyo TX-NR515

Onkyo takes aim once again at the lower end of the AVR market

94 Panasonic TX-P65VT50

The Japanese tech giant puts the 'big' into bigscreen TV with its new 65in 3D plasma

96 Elipson Planet M 5.1

Add a touch of style to your home cinema with this designer 5.1 sub/sat package

99 Datacolor Spyder4TV HD

Will this new screen calibration system transform the performance of your TV?

100 LG SP820

Second-generation 'Smart TV upgrader'

105 Grouptest: AirPlay speakers

Stream your digital music all round the house with the Altec Lansing InAir 5000, Audyssey Audio Dock Air, Logitech UE Air Speaker, Philips Fidelio SoundCurve DS8800W and Teufel iTeufel Air

PLUS...

71 Feedback

Share your thoughts with other AV addicts

115 Next Issue

We reveal ten ways to pimp your system!



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BULLETIN

→ **News highlights** **BOSE** Second-gen 'entertainment system' hits the high street
YOUVIEW Lord Sugar chats about the delayed IPTV service **TOGETHER FOR SHORT LIVES** UK charity drive brings home cinema to children's hospices **NEWS X10** The hottest news stories in bite-size chunks
SNOW WHITE & THE HUNTSMAN Will this BD be the fairest of them all? **AND MUCH MORE!**

Great Dane

Artcoustic C-2 SL → www.artcoustic.co.uk



Don't mistake the C-2 SL with a soundbar – this new £2,500 beast from Danish audio specialist Artcoustic is actually a dedicated centre-channel speaker, albeit with a plethora of drivers. Designed to complement the brand's existing lineup of 'high-output' speakers (including the SL 8-4s), this new enclosure features no fewer than twelve 3in bass units and six 1.5in tweeters and is available in bespoke widths from 1115mm to 2500mm.

HCC Online...

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Full-bodied flatscreen

Bose VideoWave II → www.bose.co.uk

Best known for its work in audio systems, Bose dipped its toes into the world of TVs with its VideoWave 'entertainment system' in 2010. Two years on and the company has unveiled its next-gen VideoWave II. Priced around £4,700 for the 46in model and £5,500 for the 55in screen, the system

combines an LED TV with a media box that packs an integrated iPod/iPhone dock, four HDMI inputs and twin USB ports. Most intriguingly of all, Bose claims that the system doesn't need additional speakers thanks to the 16 it has built into the TV's chassis, including six woofers.



TAKE A BOW

Smash hit *The Hunger Games* arrives on BD, p122

Square sounds



KEF has bolstered its range of British-designed custom install speakers with the arrival of the CS and QS Square and CL and QL Rectangle models. The QS and QL models feature KEF's familiar Uni-Q driver array, while the CS and CL versions pack an 'Asymmetrical Tweeter Island'. Other features include forward woofer-mounting and an Ultra-Thin Bezel design, while magnetic grilles, wider mounting leg fixings and protective PCB covers are optional. Prices start at £150 for the Ci130CS and finish at £340 for the Ci200QL. www.kef.com

Crystal streamer



Crystal Acoustics has announced the latest addition to its range of media players. Priced around £90, the DLNA certified AppStreamer Gigabit media player, based around a Realtek 1185 processor, claims compatibility with MKV, DivX, WMV, FLAC, MP3 and BD/DVD ISO files, provides passthrough for DTS-HD MA and Dolby TrueHD audio, and offers web browsing and 'net radio. Connections include HDMI v1.3, composite video, coaxial digital, USB, Ethernet, and stereo audio outs. A Wi-Fi dongle is also available separately. www.crystallaudiovideo.com

Capital speakers

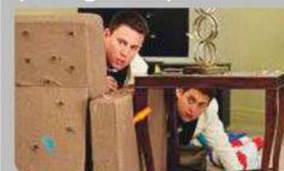


Boston Acoustics is taking an aggressive approach to the mid-price market with its new M Series. Promising 'luxurious design and sonic refinement', the range launches with the two-way M25 bookshelf model (£680) and a pair of three-way floorstanders. The M350 (£2,200) features four 5.25in woofers and a 4in midrange driver, while the smaller M340 (£1,700) utilises four 4in woofers. All three models in the range feature a second-gen Extended Wide Bandwidth (EWB) 1in tweeter designed to minimize phase shift and distortion. www.bostonaudio.com

Playlist...

Team HCC reveals its Playback picks of the last month

21 Jump Street (All-region BD)



This surprisingly smart and hilariously filthy action-comedy has kept the HCC team in fits of giggles over the past month. Simply excellent

The Expendables: DC (Region B BD)



Sylvester Stallone refines and rejuvenates his old-school bullet-fest with this 'Extended Director's Cut' BD

Barbarella (All-region BD)

Like being trapped inside a lava lamp with a semi-naked Jane Fonda for 90 minutes. Groovy!



Sebastian Bergman (Region B BD)



Another slice of Scandinavian noir arrives on Blu-ray in the UK, just in time to fill the gap left by *The Bridge*

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (All-region BD)



Watching Howard Hawks' classic comedy in high-def has been an absolute joy. Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell have never looked better

'A great moment in UK TV'

YouView revolution finally kicks off, two years later than planned

YouView, the subscription-free service conceived to do for internet TV what Freeview did for terrestrial digital broadcasting, has finally launched. Numerous delays have dogged the platform once known as Project Canvas, but this didn't deter company chairman Lord Alan Sugar describing its arrival as 'a great moment in British television – a TV service for the nation.'

Backed by the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Five, TalkTalk, BT and Arqiva, the first YouView box is a 500GB digital TV recorder built by Humax. Selling for £300, it is initially available at John Lewis, Currys, Comet, Argos, Amazon, Richer Sounds and Euronics. The STB will also be used as an incentive for broadband bundles.

Counting the cost

But the launch comes at a cost. YouView has blown through £70m in development funding, with a not inconsiderable £10m contributed by the BBC from the licence fee. Lord Sugar declared the bill 'a cheap price to pay for such a great piece of



Lord Alan Sugar: '£70m is a cheap price to pay for such a great piece of technology'

technology.' He added that it was the BBC's duty to apportion part of its funds to 'bring out a great television system for the future.'

Box-maker Humax told HCC that it is prepping a fleet of YouView PVRs for launch this year, including a Wi-Fi enabled version of the debut model. To help early adopters get online, the brand is selling a compatible £30 Wi-Fi dongle and encouraging retailers to bundle the product with Powerline adaptors, which allow the internet to be delivered via the ring main. A second YouView PVR, with a 1TB hard drive, is 'imminent'.

While Lord Sugar maintains that YouView 'has to walk before it can run,' he confirmed that 'there are definite plans to integrate the service into TVs'. A non-PVR single-tuner version, designed to bring the cost down, is also in development. 'Would I be surprised if the cost of a YouView box fell to £99 in a year's time? Not really,' says *The Apprentice* star.

When asked if consumers would find the deck difficult to connect to the internet, Lord Sugar shrugged: 'You can't get any easier than this. You don't need a huge instruction manual, it comes with a crib sheet. With the greatest respect, if they can't understand it, they shouldn't be watching TV.'

Humax is currently the group's only hardware partner



Hired or fired? See what we make of the YouView STB in our review on p84

«Rewind

What was hot in home cinema a decade ago?

Find out as we peel back the pages on the October 2002 issue of HCC...



Notice anything different? That's right, *HCC* underwent a bit of a face-lift with this issue, sporting a new logo on the front cover and plenty of other design tweaks intended to make the mag 'easier to read and navigate.'

Making its one and only appearance this issue was Cine Max ('the home of high-end theatre'), a special 40-page section featuring reviews of ten home cinema projectors, a guide to choosing a projection screen and the chance to win your very own Toshiba TLP-MT7 projector.

Elsewhere we checked out a home cinema belonging to a man whose job was mixing live sound for Metallica, investigated the growing home cinema market in Russia and explored the odd relationship between violent movies and cuisine(!)

AV heroes help hospices

UK charity drive brings home theatre to children with short lives

A UK charity initiative to install home cinemas in children's hospices has been adopted by the ISE, organisers of the influential AV trade show Integrated Systems Europe, with the aim of expanding the program across Europe.

The original project was the brainchild of Ian Morrish, Sales Manager at ISE. Morrish told *HCC* that he was inspired to do the work after watching the Channel Four TV show *The Secret Millionaire*.

'One particular episode featured a chap who donated to a holiday home for terminally-ill kids called Donna's Dream House,' he says. 'Afterwards I felt the need to contribute something myself. I thought there was scope to get in a nice plasma and surround sound system, so I got in touch.'

With AV industry support, Morrish and his team installed a system in the facility. 'It was a pretty high-end home theatre, with media server, 5.1 speaker system, cinema chairs and popcorn machines,' he recalls. 'When I first saw the enormous effect it had on the children, I just walked out of the room and burst into tears. At that point I felt I had a responsibility to do it again.'

From tiny acorns...

Since then, Morrish and assorted industry volunteers, working with the Together For Short Lives organisation, have installed four more cinemas in children's hospices across the country – the most recent at the Acorns children's hospice in Walsall. Kit donated to that installation included five B&W FMP4 flatpanel wall speakers, a Rotel RSX-1550 AVR,



Ian Morrish: 'When I first saw the effect it had on the children I burst into tears'

an Epson EH-TW3600 projector and a NAD T535 DVD player. Additional projects are ongoing.

The concept gained even more momentum recently when Integrated Systems Europe announced an offshoot, called SeeHearTouch. Under the auspices of SeeHearTouch, ISE says it will reach out to umbrella groups representing children's hospices in a number of European countries, and solicit the support of manufacturers and distributors willing to donate equipment, as well as installers prepared to undertake design and installation work.

'This is a wonderful way for the AV community to contribute its expertise in a way that really makes a difference to children with short lives and the people who care for them,' says ISE MD Mike Blackman. ISE's first charity install will be at the Irmengard Hof, in Bavaria, arranged in conjunction with Germany's National Association of Children's Hospices. Additional projects are planned in France and Benelux. Morrish says he will continue to oversee children's hospice installs in the UK.

Anybody in the industry who would like to contribute to future projects can contact Ian Morrish directly by email at ian@ad-con.demon.co.uk or telephone: 01372 454 366.

Helping hand: Morrish (right) and friends at the Acorn hospice



Cult horror in HD



Cult label Second Sight has already wowed horror fans with its stunning Blu-ray release of the '80s horror-comedy *The Return of the Living Dead* (reviewed back in *HCC* 209), and now it's getting ready to make them even happier with a limited edition Blu-ray steelbook release of Frank Henenlotter's *Basket Case* trilogy, scheduled for a pre-Halloween release on October 22. The distributor is also promising 'special edition' Blu-rays of *Re-Animator*, *Bride of Re-Animator*, *From Beyond* and *Society* before the year is out. www.secondsightfilms.co.uk

Satellite of love



Moonrise Kingdom, the latest film from director Wes Anderson (*The Royal Tenenbaums*) comes to DVD and BD in the UK on October 1. A typically quirky and eccentric coming-of-age story, the film reunites Anderson with regular collaborator Bill Murray, and co-stars Bruce Willis, Edward Norton and Harvey Keitel. The sole extra feature on the DVD is the self-explanatory *Set Tour with Bill Murray*, while the Blu-ray also gets the *A Look Inside Moonrise Kingdom* and *Welcome to the Island of New Penzance* featurettes. www.universalphictures.co.uk

Biff! Pow! Blam!



Holy Bat-discs! It looks like the classic '60s *Batman* TV series might finally be winging its way to DVD in the near future. A release had previously been held up due to the fact that, while 20th Century Fox holds the rights to the series, Warner Bros. owns the rights to the characters. However, it appears that a deal has now been struck between the two studios, with Warner Bros. recently releasing new spin-off merchandise in the US using imagery from the series. Industry sources also claim that actors from the series have been contacted about a potential DVD release.

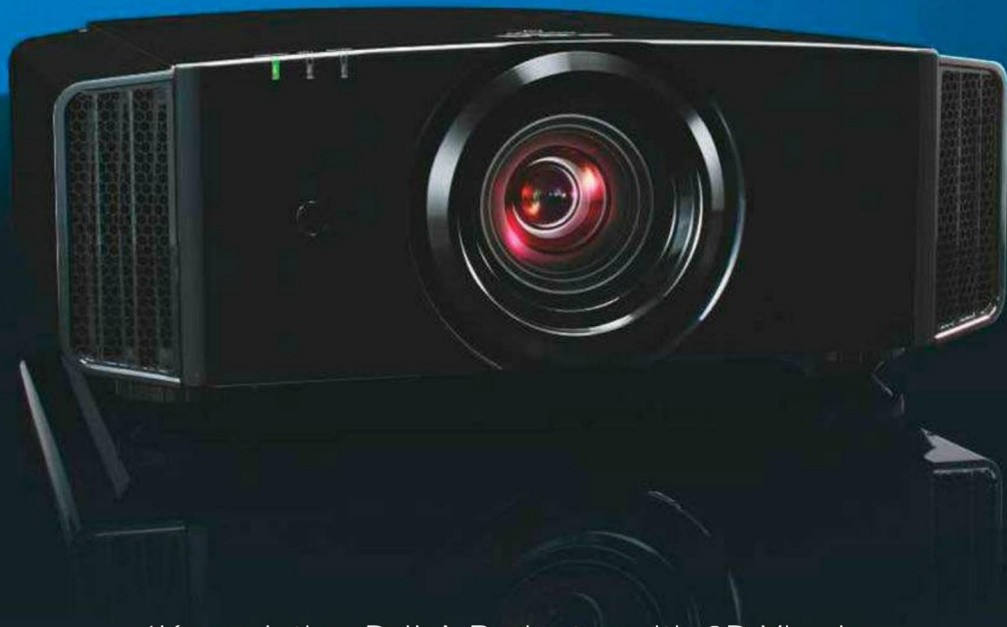
High-rise havoc



The hottest Asian action movie of the past decade, *The Raid*, will be punching and kicking its way onto DVD and Blu-ray in the UK on September 24. Both versions come packed with extras, including a UK-exclusive audio commentary, behind-the-scenes featurettes and interviews, while the hi-def version adds video blogs and the US and original cuts of the film. Online retailer Play.com will also be stocking an exclusive Blu-ray steelbook edition with cover art by award-winning comic book artist Mark 'Jock' Simpson. www.momentumpictures.co.uk

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August 2012



August 2012

Contact hdworld@jvc.co.uk for a special preview.

www.jvc.co.uk



Tech Diary

Our calendar is here to make sure you don't miss out...

→ AUGUST

24: The Watch

Today sees the UK cinema release of this sci-fi comedy starring Ben Stiller, Jonah Hill, Vince Vaughn and Richard Ayoade as a neighbourhood watch group who come up against an alien invader www.fox.co.uk

27: The Walking Dead: The Complete Second Season

The hit zombie TV series takes a second bite out of Blu-ray in the UK today. Let's hope it's uncensored this time, not like the censored first season released here www.entertainmenttone.co.uk

29: Total Recall



Colin Farrell takes over from Arnold Schwarzenegger in Len Wiseman's cinematic do-over of Philip K Dick's sci-fi story. Head to your nearest cinema to find out what's real and what's a dream... www.sonypictures.org

31: IFA 2012

The entire UK AV industry heads to Germany today as Europe's biggest consumer technology show opens its doors today at the sprawling Messe Berlin www.ifa-berlin.de

→ SEPTEMBER



3: Piranha 3DD

Entertainment in Video is promising 'Double the action, double the terror and double the Ds' when it unleashes this gore-strewn horror sequel on DVD and Blu-ray in the UK today www.entertainmentfilms.co.uk

10: Lawrence of Arabia

The tail-end of 2012 is shaping up to be a great time for fans of classic films on Blu-ray. Arriving in the UK today, *Lawrence of Arabia* celebrates its 50th anniversary with a brand-new restoration based on an 8K scan of the original camera negatives. We'll certainly be snapping this one up! www.sonypictures.co.uk

20: HCC #213

Your favourite home cinema magazine hits the stands today, packed with hardware tests, features, outspoken opinion and in-depth software reviews www.homecinemachoice.com

Harvard comes of age

View21 STB showcases Smart functionality and inventive apps

Typical, isn't it? You spend ages waiting for one set-top box that promises to 'revolutionise TV' by seamlessly integrating live broadcasts and Smart functionality, and two of them come along at the same time.

Harvard International's new View21 STB brings together twin Freeview HD tuners, PVR functionality with a choice of 320GB or 500GB hard drives, and a variety of internet applications including YouTube, Twitter, Flickr and BBC iPlayer. But what has it got to make itself stand apart from the first YouView boxes?

'Well, it's going to be a lot less than £300, a lot cheaper than YouView,' is one answer offered up by Christian Corney, Buying & Marketing Director, Harvard International, when HCC cornered him for a chat. Of course, there's a lot more to it than that.

Network television

The View21 box has a rather nifty ace up its sleeve in the form of its View21 Play iPad app. Like many other similar apps, View21 Play provides an 8-day EPG and allows the iPad to be used as a remote control for the STB. What makes it rather more exciting is that it also allows you to view live TV content and recordings on your iPad over your home network. And if you should happen to have more than one View21 box in the house, the app



Christian Corney: 'If you buy a View21 box you'll know that the apps will actually be worthwhile and useful'

can be configured to command them all. A second-gen app compatible with iPhones should have launched by the time you read this.

But what about Android devices? 'The benefit of developing for iOS devices first is that it's a very stable and fixed environment',

says Corney. 'When you do it for Android you have to work out which flavour, and which devices on that flavour. So we've really got to identify the minimum specification for the hardware that's going to be able to support the functionality and then work up from there. But it's coming.'

Also promised in the future are additional catch-up services like ITV Player and 4OD, and maybe even more advanced VOD offerings. 'It's technically possible to extend the functionality of the product to support some video-on-demand content, but there are issues to address regarding digital rights,' revealed Corney. 'But absolutely, if we firmly believe in connected TV and the connected STB environment, then we are going to have to offer those kinds of services in the future.'



A Freesat version of the box also remains a possibility

Touch and go



The TSW-750 is the latest (and probably the most stylish) addition

to Crestron's range of touch-panel controllers. Retailing for a little over £1,600, this tech-tastic device features an edge-to-edge glass touchscreen and is powered by Core 3 UI framework, allowing the creation of graphically-rich user interfaces. It also boasts high-performance video streaming capabilities (with native support for H.264 and MJPEG formats) and includes five soft-touch buttons for quick access to commonly used functions such as 'Power' and 'Lights'. www.crestron.eu

Audio styling



While network media players are becoming more ubiquitous, there are still few that look as if they've

been designed to be put on display in a living room rather than hidden away. Linn Audio's two-channel Kiko system is one of those that begs to be put on show. Priced around £2,500, and available in a range of six colours, the compact system boasts fully-active two-way Kiko speakers and features connective options and file support to access audio stored on computers, smartphones, tablets, Blu-ray players, set-top boxes and online services. www.linn.co.uk

Onkyo upgrades



Onkyo has expanded the music streaming options for its 2012 AVR line-up. The upgraded Onkyo

Remote App 2 for iOS devices allows direct music streaming through a wireless home network, while the upgraded version for Android devices adds streaming from the Kindle Fire. The upgraded free apps also provide support for high-performance lossless file formats. Onkyo has also introduced the UBT-1 Bluetooth USB adapter (pictured), which costs around £50 and allows Bluetooth-enabled devices to stream directly to a compatible AVR. www.uk.onkyo.com

This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 Time Lord takes control
Having made a name for itself with its magic wand-styled universal remote control, The Wand Company is back and has joined forces with BBC Worldwide to thrill *Doctor Who* fans with its new Sonic Screwdriver Universal Remote Control. Priced around £60, the metal replica of the Mark VII sonic screwdriver promises to 'manipulate almost all earth-based home entertainment systems' through a series of 13 programmed gestures, such as rotating, flicking and tapping. The device also offers optional vintage *Doctor Who* sound effects for hardcore Whovians.

2 Porn pirates
O2 customers who illegally downloaded adult films made by Ben Dover Productions will soon be receiving warning letters after the firm won a court order forcing O2 to hand over the 9,000 IP addresses of the guilty parties. Wasn't us, honest.

3 Set-top box use drops
There are tough times ahead for set-top box manufacturers, if the latest research from IHS Screen Data is to be believed. It claims that the percentage of global households using STBs to access pay-TV channels will drop more than 31 per cent by 2015, with consumers favouring PCs, smartphones and tablets instead.

4 DTS partners Samsung
DTS and Samsung have entered into a collaboration that will see the integration of the former's audio solution into the latter's flagship 7000 and 8000 series LED and plasma Smart TVs. In related news, DTS has announced the acquisition of SRS Labs, Inc. a leader in audio processing technology.

5 TiVo's golden milestone
Virgin Media has reached the landmark figure of one million customers for its TiVo service. To celebrate, the company had Spandau Ballet bassist-turned-actor Martin Kemp present the service's one-millionth customer with a one-off, specially created, golden TiVo set-top box and a 3DTV. Altogether now: 'Gold! Always believe in your soul...'

6 Is Shrek heading to Sony?
Recent reports indicate that DreamWorks Animation has entered into a discussion about distribution deals with Sony Pictures. DreamWorks' existing distribution contract with Paramount expires next year, and it is understood that the latter studio has already turned down a requested extension to the agreement that would see its profit participation drop from eight to seven per cent.

7 Panasonic integrates DivX
Rovi has entered into an agreement with Panasonic that will see its feature-rich DivX Plus Streaming technology integrated into the UniPhier series of digital TV and Blu-ray circuit solutions from the latter's Semiconductor Business Group. Rovi claims that DivX Plus Streaming 'brings a robust, cutting-edge feature-set to streaming media that is typically characteristic of the Blu-ray experience.'

8 Sonos app
Sonos has released a new software update (3.8.1) for its Controller apps. Users of the iPad/iPhone version now benefit from high-res graphics and the ability to control volume directly with the device's volume buttons. Meanwhile, the Android version has been optimised for all Android tablets.

9 Rest in peace
Former Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. president and honorary chairman of Panasonic, Masaharu Matsushita, passed away in July at the age of 99. 'I honour from the bottom of my heart his achievements in steering our company towards tremendous growth,' stated current chairman Fumio Ohtsubo.

10 Polaroid returns
Asda has entered into an exclusive partnership with the iconic Polaroid brand in the UK. While the brand remains best known for its instant cameras, Asda's new Polaroid range takes in a much wider variety of products including a £40(!) 5.1-channel Home Theatre Speaker System (pictured) and a £400 42in HD Ready Passive 3D LCD TV.



Premiere

HCC's guide to what's happening in the world of TV and films...

Jumanji again

Sony Pictures president Doug Belgrad has revealed that the studio is working on a remake of *Jumanji* that will 'try and re-imagine and update it for the present'. Forgive us for stating the obvious, but wasn't that the same notion that led to the forgettable 2005 flick *Zathura*?

Back to the fish tank



It seems that Pixar's Andrew Stanton is going back to doing what he knows best following the disappointing box office returns of *John Carter*. Reports indicate that the filmmaker has agreed to direct a sequel to his 2003 smash *Finding Nemo* as his next project.

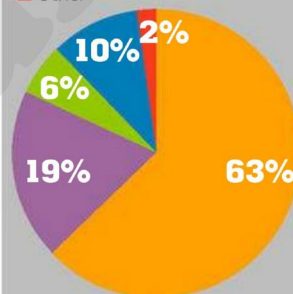
Unexpected journey

Peter Jackson has announced that his adaptation of *The Hobbit* will now stretch across three films. He states that the idea came after watching a cut of the first film and a large part of the second, which left him wanting to expand the story even further.

We asked...

How do you control your home cinema system?

- Multiple remote controls
- Affordable universal remote
- High-end touchpanel
- Tablet or smartphone
- Other



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

Always a Pioneer

The new VSX-922 AV Receiver provides 7.2 surround sound, AirPlay streaming, compatibility with iPod Touch, iPhone or iPad, HDMI with 3D, ARC and 1080p video processing.

The new iControlAV2012 App from Pioneer

iControlAV2012 makes it easy to operate virtually all functions of your Pioneer AV Receiver using your iPhone, iPod touch or iPad on your Wi-Fi network.



Made for

iPod iPhone iPad



Pioneer

www.pioneer.co.uk

iPad®, iPhone®, and AirPlay® are trademarks of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. iPhone, iPad and AirPlay are trademarks of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. "Made for iPod/iPhone/iPad" means that an electronic accessory has been designed to connect specifically to iPod/iPhone/iPad and has been certified by the developer to meet Apple performance standards. Apple is not responsible for the operation of this device or its compliance with safety and regulatory standards. Pioneer does not sell iPods/iPhones/iPads.

Grimm tidings

Snow White & the Huntsman → Universal Pictures → All-region BD/R2 DVD

Forget all about jolly singing dwarfs and animals that help with the housework – the *Snow White* fairy tale undergoes a radical rethink for this epic fantasy blockbuster. The film hits DVD and BD in the UK on October 8, joined by a Limited Edition Blu-ray Steelbook Collector's Boxset that will set you back around £40 and adds a 72-page book, four exclusive film stills, four art lithographs and a poster.



xeo

Dynaudio Wireless High-End 



Xeo is new, Xeo is easy, Xeo is smart, Xeo is game-changing. Because Xeo is the very first wireless and remote controlled High-End loudspeaker system. Say goodbye to speaker cables, D/A converters, amplifiers and special software. Unplug them all. And simply plug in the Xeo compact or floor standing loudspeakers and the Xeo Transmitter. Unplug and play. www.xeo.dynaudio.com

All there is. **DYNAUDIO**

The European Imaging & Sound Association

AWARDS 2012-2013



The annual EISA Awards celebrate the best of the best in home entertainment technology – make sure the following products are on your audition list

The European Imaging and Sound Association (EISA) is the technology world's largest independent awards panel, incorporating 50 specialist magazines from across the continent – including, as of this year, *Home Cinema Choice*. Its goal is simple: to celebrate the most desirable, highest-performing home entertainment hardware that you – the AV enthusiasts – will be spending your hard-earned pennies on.

The featured awards here are the selections from the Video Panel and the Audio & Home Theatre Panel, covering everything from flatscreen TVs to Blu-ray players, speakers, projectors and AV receivers. Chosen after a lengthy judging process throughout the Summer, during which the member magazines convene and whittle down a shortlist, these can be considered the cream of the consumer electronics crop. Read on...

**EUROPEAN 3D
ACHIEVEMENT 2012-2013****Toshiba 55ZL2**

Toshiba's 55ZL2 represents the start of a new era in TV technology, because for the first time ever consumers can experience 3D at home without having to wear special glasses. 3D movies are displayed at a resolution of 720p to as many as nine viewers, thanks to the TV's thousands of micro-lenses, built-in face-recognition system and powerful processor. To achieve this technological feat, the 55ZL2 employs a panel with more than 8 million pixels, making it possible to display still images at an ultra-sharp 3840 x 2160 resolution. And, of course, 2D viewing of 1080p material, upscaled to full panel resolution, is also offered. The 55ZL2 is a groundbreaking TV that needs to be seen to be believed.



why copy cinema sound?
this **is** cinema sound.



Derived from Datasat's audio processors in cinemas worldwide, the **RS20i** will replicate the nature and experience of cinema sound more accurately than any other home cinema processor.

Authentic cinema audio from the source.

www.datasatdigital.com

DATASAT
DIGITAL SOUND

**EUROPEAN HT SOLUTION
2012-2013****Loewe Connect ID 46
+ Home Cinema Set 5.1**

This combined home theatre system provides a stylish, flexible solution that's easily integrated into your living room, due to the fact that the Connect ID 46 offers 2,160 feature and design combinations, including different stands, colours and specifications. The TV's picture quality is matched by the excellent audio performance of the Home Cinema Set 5.1, which includes the MediaVision 3D Blu-ray system with iPod/iPhone dock, five satellite speakers and a wireless subwoofer. Control is made simple via Loewe's new iPad-compatible Assist Media app. This is a premium package that benefits from high-quality materials and excellent craftsmanship.





Award winning / audio unleashed



SB 30. This next-generation soundbar-speaker system connects directly to your flat-panel TV and delivers an astonishingly realistic 3D surround-sound experience in any size room, thanks to HARMAN Wave surround-mode technology. A 100-watt wireless subwoofer, 13 transducers and 11 amplifiers are built in, so you can enjoy immersive home theater sound without the clutter of speakers and cables. Discover beauty that truly speaks volumes at harmankardon.com.

beautiful/sound
harman/kardon
by HARMAN



HARMAN

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**EUROPEAN PROJECTOR
2012-2013****Epson EH-TW9000W**

The Epson EH-TW9000W is one of the first home cinema projectors to include technology for the wireless transmission of Full HD 3D images – making long HDMI cable runs a thing of the past. The high power E-TORL lamp, combined with a 480Hz refresh rate, creates bright, smooth 3D pictures. The optical engine includes a large zoom range and horizontal/vertical lens shift, making set-up very easy, while excellent video processing and movement compensation also ensure the Epson's performance is first rate. This is one of the best solutions that can be found on the market today – use it to build the home cinema set-up of your dreams!





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**EUROPEAN HT RECEIVER
2012-2013****Pioneer VSX-922**

Success in the competitive AV field is hard won, so Pioneer has worked harder than most to take our Receiver Award for the second year in a row, this time for its fine-sounding VSX-922. Casual inspection reveals little change from Pioneer's previous generation, but there are key improvements including six 3D-compatible HDMI inputs, 7.2 channel outputs and a host of new video processing options to improve picture quality. The VSX-922 supports both DLNA and AirPlay, has a digital connection for iPod, iPhone or iPad and plays WAV or FLAC music files up to 192kHz/24-bit via its wired network or USB connections. Functional and fun, interactive control is also offered in the form of Pioneer's iControlAV2012 app for smartphones and tablets.



A NEW DIMENSION IN 3D HOME CINEMA

Amazingly bright Full HD 3D viewing – Epson EH-TW9000W / EH-TW9000

Discover one of the brightest Full HD 3D visual experiences available. Powered by Epson's 3LCD and unique luminance enhancement technology, you get an amazingly sharp contrast ratio, the brightest light output and the most natural images. Any Blu-ray disc™ media or 2D video can be converted to 3D, with a push of a button.

- 3D emitter embedded into the projectors
- Newly developed C2Fine LCD panels
- 480Hz refresh rate in 3D mode for bright, comfortable 3D viewing
- High-quality 230W E-TORL lamp

Advanced wireless technology – Epson EH-TW9000W

One of the first home projectors to feature wireless¹ Full HD 3D technology. Simply connect Blu-ray players or laptops to the wireless HD transmitter to experience your favourite content on a large cinematic scale, without image deterioration. Enjoy flexible installation, with no unsightly wires, thanks to the wireless HD transmitter included in the box.



**EUROPEAN HT
SOUNDBAR 2012-2013****Harman Kardon SB30**

With its SB30, Harman Kardon takes a big stride towards a grand home cinema experience. Key to the success of this soundbar and sub combination is its 'Harman Wave Surround' technology, a marriage of no fewer than six small midrange drivers, seven metal/ceramic tweeters and eleven channels of power. For realistic bass extension, the system includes a wireless subwoofer with an 8in driver and powerful 100W Class D amplifier. Installation is easy, just hook the SB30 to your TV or BD player through analogue or digital connections and you're good to go. Dolby Volume ensures you'll not fall off the sofa when the adverts start while sound quality with movies and concert BDs benefits from a realistic tonal balance, good focus and a great sense of acoustic space.



Always a Pioneer

The new SC-LX86 AV Receiver includes built-in USB-DAC for easy connection to any PC, so you can enjoy high resolution music files directly.

Technical excellence guaranteed

The AIR Studios logo on a Pioneer product is the result of a partnership in design and development since the prototype stage.

www.airstudios.com/technical/pioneer.aspx



Pioneer

www.pioneer.co.uk

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**EUROPEAN HT
SUBWOOFER 2012-2013****Bowers & Wilkins PVID**

The B&W PVID is no ordinary subwoofer, it's bass done with style. Its curvaceous shell houses a pair of back-to-back drivers, mounted to cancel unwanted resonances, and powered by a new 400W-rated Class D amplifier. The drivers are equally special, the lightweight but very stiff diaphragms a sandwich of expanded polystyrene between an aluminium face and rear paper/Kevlar layer. Comprehensive onboard DSP prevents overload and audible distortion from this deceptively compact sub while B&W's recommended low-pass filter and delay settings aids its integration into both 2.1 and fully-fledged 7.1 home theatre speaker systems. Action movie fans will be delighted to discover B&W's four EQ presets, one of which will fill any room with a clean and deep, rib-tickling bass.



5 OUT OF 5 WAS OUR STARTING POINT



TL963

THE AWARD-WINNING TL 3D TV JUST GOT EVEN BETTER

Stuff Magazine and What Hi-Fi both gave us five stars for our previous 3D TV, the TL868. What Hi-Fi even added, "it is worth every one of its five stars". You might think that would be a hard act to follow. But we have just gone one better with the new TL963, adding the ability to upscale 2D into 3D, and a super-slim, brushed-silver bezel.

We hope you'll agree that our designers deserve top marks.

www.toshiba.co.uk/TLseries



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Leading Innovation >>>

EUROPEAN STREAMING PRODUCT 2012-2013

Pioneer N-50

Network-enabled hi-fi separates are evolving at a fierce pace but Pioneer's N-50 is sufficiently ahead of the pack that it sets the standard in its class. Its 2.4in colour LCD screen squeezes in a lot of information, including a thumbnail of the album cover and details of the file type and sampling frequency. The N-50 is also a lot heavier than its slim profile suggests thanks to its multiple power supplies and reinforced chassis. But most important of all, its DLNA-compliant Ethernet connection will handle the highest resolution 24-bit/192kHz media with other connections to support legacy digital products, USB audio and external Wi-Fi/Bluetooth adapters. Musically, it serves up a soundstage you can walk into – guitars sound slinky and cymbals positively sizzle as the N-50 weaves its digital magic.

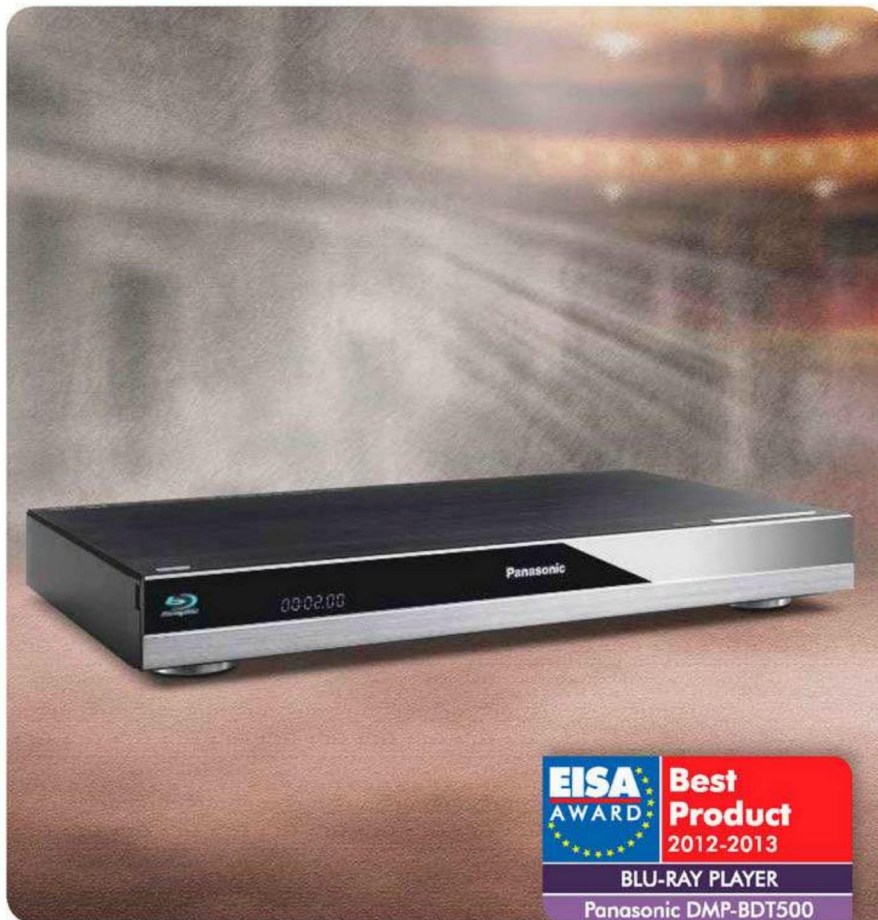


**EUROPEAN WIRELESS
HI-FI 2012-2013****Dynaudio Xeo**

Hi-fi without cables? If this is your domestic dream then Dynaudio has the solution with its Xeo wireless audio system. If Wi-Fi is traditionally associated with lo-fi then Xeo looks to set a higher standard with its bespoke transmitter capable of streaming music, up to 16-bit/48kHz resolution, to its Xeo 3 standmount and Xeo 5 floorstanding loudspeakers. Both speakers include two 50W amplifiers for their bass and treble drivers while the partnering Xeo transmitter features analogue, USB and Toslink optical digital inputs for compatibility with a wide range of hi-fi sources. Not only does Xeo support multiple sources but it will also stream out to three independent speaker zones, spreading its lively and dynamic sound quality throughout your home.



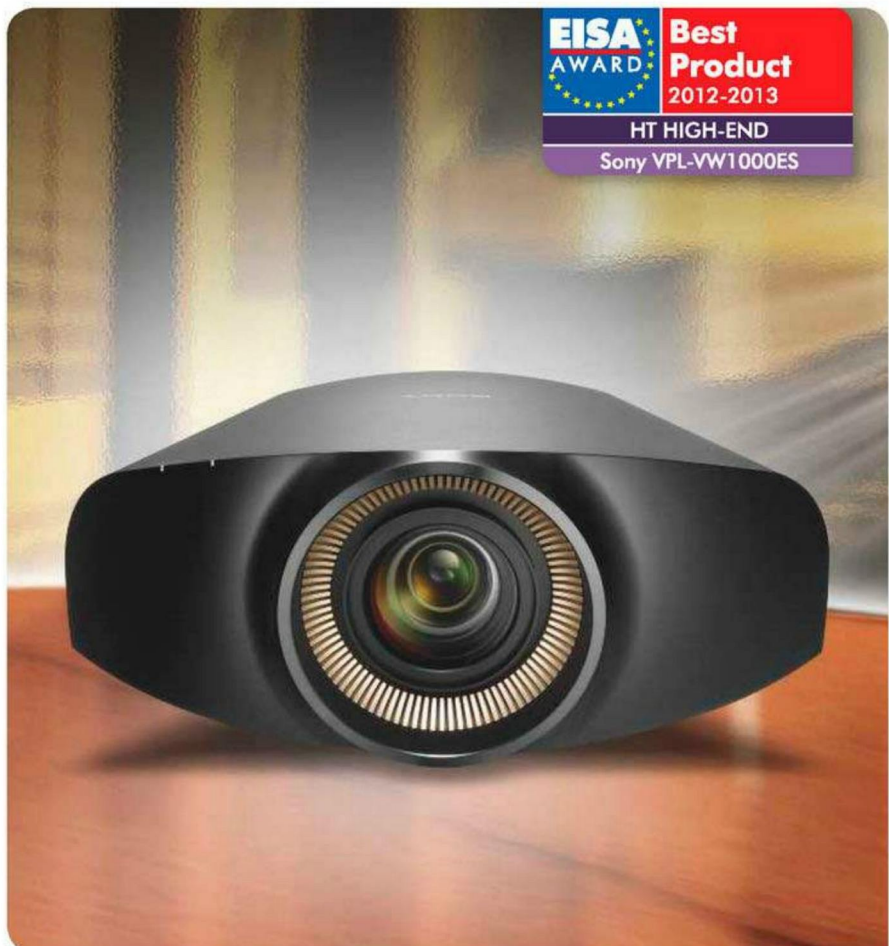
32 PANASONIC → SONY → KEF → CANTON

**EUROPEAN BLU-RAY
PLAYER 2012-2013****Panasonic DMP-BDT500**

Panasonic's DMP-BDT500 has it all. Fast and reliable when reading CD/DVD/BD discs, this multi-purpose modern player offers additional applications to connect with internet services and allows DLNA file-streaming. Generous connections include two HDMI's, making it easy to integrate with the rest of your system. Besides an advanced video processor that provides picture calibration, the DMP-BDT500 has a very special audio processor that allows you to choose between the sonic characteristics of six different vacuum tubes. Digital-to-analogue conversion is based on four 192kHz/32-bit DACs, and the Panasonic is ready to read FLAC files up to 192kHz/24-bit. LAN and Wi-Fi connections, touchpad remote control and applications for Android and iOS complete this impressive package.

**EUROPEAN HT HIGH-END
2012-2013****Sony VPL-VW1000ES**

Home theatre diehards have keenly anticipated a true 4K projector and Sony's VPL-VW1000ES is that dream given form. This inaugural native 4K home theatre projector offers a full 4096 2160 pixel resolution and is based on Sony's professional cinema solution. At its core are three new SXRD matrix panels capable of delivering a claimed 1,000,000:1 dynamic contrast ratio through its specially developed 2.1x zoom lens. As you would expect for a projector of this resolution, its picture processing is exceptional, upscaling Full HD input to fill its 4K capacity with seamless efficiency. Your favourite movies have never looked so vivid, detailed and realistic – this is the projector of the future, available today.



EUROPEAN HT LOUDSPEAKER 2012-2013

Canton Vento 800.2 System

Showing that great speakers can always be made better, Canton's latest generation of its successful Vento series is proving a real hit with home theatre fans. Our choice includes the 870.2 floorstanders partnered with the 820.2 surrounds and 856.2 centre channel – all benefiting from Canton's ceramic dome tweeter, a technology originally developed for its top-of-the-line 'Reference' series. The crossovers and six-layer laminated cabinets have also been fine-tuned so that the new Vento 800.2 series delivers a lively performance with both music and movie soundtracks. The speaker combination provides a delicious amount of detail without sounding aggressive, its spacious soundfield providing a host of home cinema fun.



EUROPEAN LOUDSPEAKER 2012-2013

KEF LS50

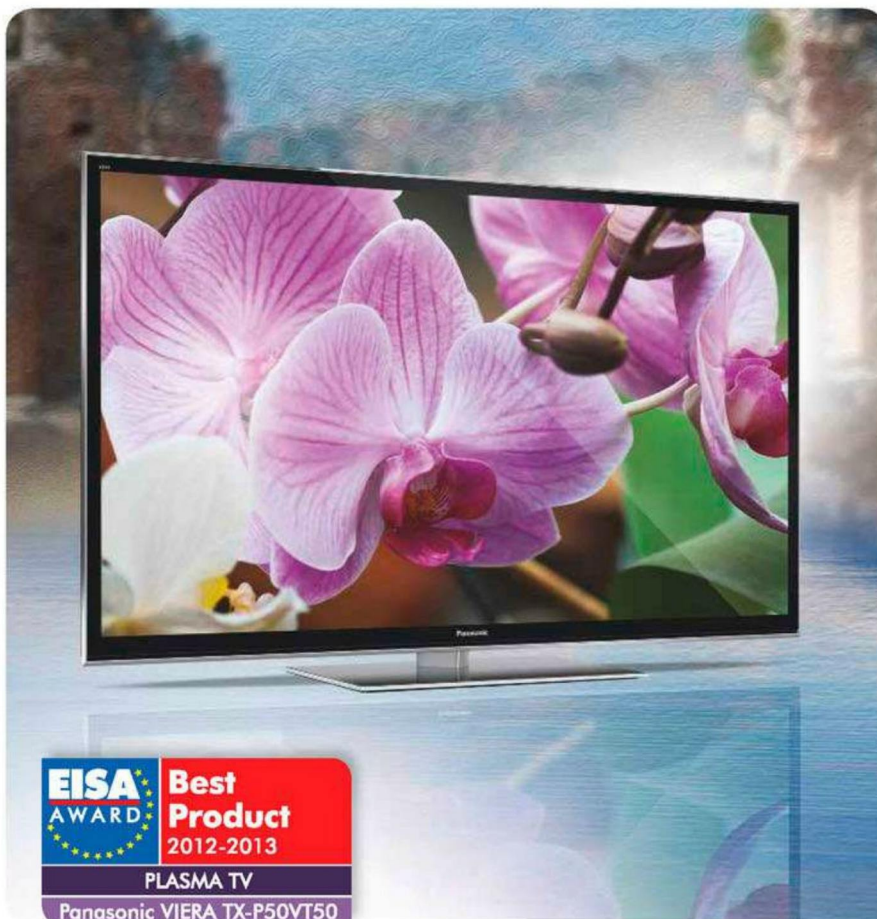
To casual viewers the LS50 will look like a minimalist, single-driver loudspeaker but in reality it's more sophisticated. In fact, this single driver is one of KEF's famous two-way Uni-Q units with its tweeter mounted at the acoustic centre of the mid/woofer. This latest iteration, coloured rose gold, features a cone formed of a special magnesium/aluminium alloy and benefits from a longer 'throw' to improve bass performance. The cabinet is not only beautifully finished but is sturdily constructed with constrained layer damping between its walls, internal cross-brace and front baffle. As promised, the LS50 delivers a remarkably big sound with vivid imaging and a tremendous bass weight that belies its compact dimensions. Shut your eyes and you'll believe you are listening to a far bigger loudspeaker.



34 PANASONIC → PHILIPS → SONY → LG

**EUROPEAN PLASMA TV
2012-2013****Panasonic VIERA TX-P50VT50**

Put simply, Panasonic's TX-P50VT50 is the best plasma TV you can buy, offering deep black levels, natural colours and a superb Full HD 3D performance. In addition, it's packed with state-of-the-art features, including built-in Wi-Fi, a web browser, access to social networks, apps via VIERA Connect and an advanced calibration mode. Connectivity is excellent, with an SD card slot, four HDMI inputs and three USB ports provided, and the TV's design is sleek and stylish. For consumers who like the picture quality that plasma technology delivers, the Panasonic TX-P50VT50 is the number one choice.

**EUROPEAN LCD TV
2012-2013****Philips 46PFL9707**

Year after year we have on the market new Philips TV models with top specifications, and year after year they surprise with even better performance. The 46PFL9707 features an improved Moth Eye filter to drastically reduce screen reflections, and the direct LED backlight with local dimming allows for deep blacks and peak brightness. Motion compensation is excellent as well, while the new Flicker Free glasses technology means you can enjoy 3D movies without the discomfort often associated with the presence of ambient light. Finally, the new remote control incorporates a keyboard to simplify navigation of the TV's Smart features.

EUROPEAN 3D TV 2012-2013

Sony BRAVIA KDL-55HX853

Sony's KDL-55HX853 is the ideal television for 3D movie fans. The very fast response time of the panel and its ability to keep the two image channels separate means image quality is striking, with almost no crosstalk. Sony's Cinema mode, meanwhile, ensures correctly-balanced colours straight out of the box, and black levels are excellent due to dimming technology that reduces the backlight in dark parts of the picture without a loss of shadow detail. As well as the superior 3D and 2D pictures, the unique lean-back stand provides a convenient, stylish viewing experience.



EUROPEAN SMART TV 2012-2013

LG 55LM960V

For many manufacturers, 2012 is the year of Smart TV, yet LG has managed not only to integrate useful apps to get content from the internet – it has made these features quickly accessible and easy to use via its improved Magic Remote with voice control. Of course, LG's Nano Full LED panel also delivers excellent black levels, high contrast and a natural colour reproduction for outstanding picture quality. With Cinema 3D, LG offers a 3D solution for the whole family, including a box full of lightweight, comfortable glasses. On top of this, the 55LM960V is one of the most elegant TVs to look at – even when it's turned off.



EUROPEAN GREEN TV 2012-2013

Philips 55PFL6007

While today's TVs are being offered with ever-bigger screens, this doesn't have to mean a bigger cost to the environment. With the 55PFL6007, Philips has created a set with increased functionality over its previous models while maintaining its standing as a brand with environmentally efficient products. Not only does the 55PFL6007 outperform its rivals when it comes to energy efficiency but it also boasts the efficient use of precious metals in its printed circuit boards. As such, a Philips TV set wins the EISA Green Award for the third year in succession.

EUROPEAN DISPLAY ACHIEVEMENT 2012-2013

LG 55EM970V/975V

After a long and demanding technological development, LG is now being ready to launch the largescreen TV of the future. The 55EM970V (or 55EM975V as the wall-mount version) uses OLED – organic light emitting diodes – to deliver high-quality pictures with incredible contrast, a wide viewing angle and deep blacks. And, because this screen technology works without a backlighting system, LG's 55in OLED TV is only 4mm thick, making it truly desirable. Crowning this revolutionary achievement is the ultra-compact receiver, amplifier and loudspeaker system built into the television's stand. OLED may not be a new screen technology, but LG is the first manufacturer to bring its benefits to consumers at a screen size that's perfect for the living room.



EISA AWARD
Best Product
 2012-2013
DISPLAY ACHIEVEMENT
 LG 55EM970V/975V

EUROPEAN FUTURE PROOF TV 2012-2013

Samsung UE46ES8000

In an age of fast-changing technical products customers will appreciate always having an up-to-date TV. With the Samsung UE46ES8000 this is now possible, thanks to the Evolution Kit that allows the hardware and software to be upgraded to the latest functions and capabilities. Of course, the UE46ES8000 already comes with modern features, including a Smart service offering a huge amount of apps, built-in Skype camera and innovative speech and gesture control. And Samsung's stunning UE46ES8000 delivers not only a future proof solution but excellent picture quality, with sharp, high-contrast pictures and neutral and realistic colours.



EISA AWARD
Best Product
 2012-2013
FUTURE PROOF TV
 Samsung UE46ES8000



EISA AWARD
Best Product
 2012-2013
HT SYSTEM
 Samsung HT-E6750W

EUROPEAN HT SYSTEM 2012-2013

Samsung HT-E6750W

Tubes fight back in this novel home theatre system from Samsung, bridging the generations between thermionic valves and modern Class D amplification. The HT-E6750W incorporates two 3D-compatible HDMI inputs and one output, this 'Smart Hub' extending the world of social networking, apps, services and on-line entertainment to any HD TV. Other media may be connected via Wi-Fi, Bluetooth or USB while the 5.1 channel loudspeakers are supplemented by a further two channels of 'virtual front surround'. Although the HT-E6750W is designed for home cinema use, its sound quality is both subtle and powerful enough for music reproduction as well. All this plus a wide selection of decoders for the latest audio and video standards ensures your enjoyment will run and run.

EUROPEAN HI-FI HEADPHONE 2012-2013

Sennheiser HD 700

Sennheiser has been at the forefront of headphone development for decades, experience reflected in the engineering of its new HD 700 model. Instantly recognisable by its elegant and very modern aesthetic, this open circumaural design incorporates a wealth of materials technology. The soft velour ear pads are supported on a silicone-damped headband while the efficiency of the internal drivers is enhanced by its ventilated magnet system. Very comfortable to wear, the HD 700 maintains Sennheiser's tradition for a tremendously detailed performance, assisted here by its proprietary angled baffles. Moreover, this model's sound possesses a welcome richness, its naturally warm aspect encouraging long spells of listening.



EISA AWARD
Best Product
2012-2013
HI-FI HEADPHONE
Sennheiser HD 700



EUROPEAN HIGH-END AUDIO 2012-2013

DALI EPICON 8

Danish loudspeaker brand DALI is no stranger to the high-end and this latest addition to the EPICON range is appropriately 'epic'. The statuesque EPICON 8 stands 1.26m tall and features a dedicated wood-fibre coned midrange driver sited above a novel hybrid tweeter module and augmented by two bass drivers. Key innovations include the use of a non-conductive powder material in the magnet system, called soft magnetic compound (SMC), claimed to reduce distortion over a wide dynamic range. The EPICON 8's enclosure is formed of six layers of MDF and is finished in a choice of gloss black and real wood veneers. Its sound is equally impressive, at once bold and intimate, its broad soundstage peppered with musical detail, filling the largest of rooms with ease.

EISA AWARD
Best Product
2012-2013
HIGH-END AUDIO
DALI EPICON 8

EUROPEAN TURNTABLE 2012-2013

Pro-Ject Debut Carbon

Despite its name, the Debut is not Pro-Ject's first turntable but one of a series that has formed the backbone of this hugely successful brand. In its latest guise, the Debut includes a one-piece chassis, available in seven gloss finishes, with a belt-driven alloy platter. The motor benefits from an improved suspension but the most distinctive feature of this deck is its new carbon-fibre tonearm, derived from Pro-Ject's popular 9cc model. The sound of this turntable combination is as mature as the design itself, with a dynamic, foot-tapping quality reminiscent of far costlier models. Voices are also portrayed with an insightful clarity and weight. If you are curious about the vinyl revival, then Pro-Ject's Debut Carbon is the ideal place to start spinning those LPs.



EISA AWARD
Best Product
2012-2013
TURNTABLE
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon

38 CAMBRIDGE AUDIO → AUDIOLAB → CANON

EUROPEAN TWO-CHANNEL SYSTEM 2012-2013

Cambridge Audio Azur 851C + 851A

When is a CD player more than a CD player? When it's designed to be an outboard D/A converter complete with integral CD drive. This is Cambridge Audio's Azur 851C, its best player to date and one that combines its most sophisticated DAC design with USB and legacy digital audio inputs. The partnering 851A amplifier is just as slick, employing the latest version of the company's proprietary Class XD technology to comfortably exceed its 120W specification. So while the 851C DAC/player brings a quiet composure to the party, the 851A is a wolf in sheep's clothing, a muscular amp that grips the speakers and serves up tight, powerful and extended bass. In the 851C and 851A you're getting cutting-edge technology for substantially less than high-end prices. Add the best speakers you can afford and this two-channel system will deliver a taste of hi-fi heaven.



EUROPEAN D/A CONVERTER 2012-2013

Audiolab M-DAC

The new age of USB computer audio has rekindled the flame of the outboard D/A converter (DAC). Among this new breed of USB DACs few are as simple to implement or as versatile in use as Audiolab's fabulous little M-DAC. It works directly with virtually all PCs and Macs without special USB drivers while its bold display shows a wealth of information about the incoming music data. An onboard volume control lets the M-DAC do the job of a preamp just as the choice of seven digital filters allows fine-tuning of its sound. And what a sound – powerful, insightful and delicate, it cuts to the heart of the music while remaining faithful to its soul. This is a very high performance product that's perfect for both the computer audio novice and seasoned enthusiast alike.

EUROPEAN CAMCORDER 2012-2013

Canon LEGRIA HF M52

The compact, handheld Canon HF M52 camcorder gives you the opportunity to shoot high-quality video with ultra-fast focusing and effective picture stabilization. The 32GB built-in flash memory provides up to three hours shooting capacity at the highest picture quality, while the camcorder also accepts external SD flash memory cards, including SDXC, meaning you should never run out of space. Built-in Wi-Fi makes it easy to share your footage via social media, DLNA-certified TV screens and iOS devices – but the standout issue is the superb picture quality, courtesy of Canon's HD CMOS Pro sensor, and the option of improving sound quality by connecting an external microphone.





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40 SONY → AND THE REST

EUROPEAN GREEN SMART PHONE 2012-2013

Sony Xperia P

The smart phone market is developing rapidly as models come packed with ever-increasing functionality. Unfortunately, the trend towards the use of bigger screens and embedded batteries can make recycling harder. The Sony Xperia P outperforms the competition in terms of energy performance while also making efficient use of materials in its printed circuit boards – including copper and precious metals – that are of environmental concern. With the Xperia P, Sony successfully follows the performance of last year's winner, its Xperia Mini.



And the rest of the EISA Awards from the Photo, In-Car Electronics and Mobile Panels

Photo Panel

EUROPEAN CAMERA 2012-2013

Nikon D800

EUROPEAN SLR CAMERA 2012-2013

Sony SLT-A57

EUROPEAN ADVANCED SLR CAMERA 2012-2013

Canon EOS 5D Mark III

EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL CAMERA 2012-2013

Nikon D4

EUROPEAN COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERA 2012-2013

Olympus OM-D E-M5

EUROPEAN ADVANCED COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERA 2012-2013

Samsung NX20

EUROPEAN PROFESSIONAL COMPACT SYSTEM CAMERA 2012-2013

Fujifilm X-Pro1

EUROPEAN COMPACT CAMERA 2012-2013

Canon PowerShot G1 X

EUROPEAN ADVANCED COMPACT CAMERA 2012-2013

Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RX100

EUROPEAN TRAVEL CAMERA 2012-2013

Sony Cyber-shot DSC-HX20V

EUROPEAN ALL WEATHER CAMERA 2012-2013

Olympus TOUGH TG-1

EUROPEAN LENS 2012-2013

Tamron SP 24-70mm F2.8 Di VC USD

EUROPEAN MACRO LENS 2012-2013

Sigma APO Macro 150mm F2.8 EX DG OS HSM

EUROPEAN COMPACT SYSTEM LENS 2012-2013

Panasonic LUMIX G X VARIO 12-35mm F2.8 ASPH

EUROPEAN PHOTO PRINTER 2012-2013

Canon PIXMA PRO-1

EUROPEAN PHOTO SOFTWARE 2012-2013

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom

In-Car Electronics Panel

EUROPEAN IN-CAR HEAD UNIT 2012-2013

Kenwood DNX4210DAB

EUROPEAN IN-CAR NAVI-MEDIA SYSTEM 2012-2013

Pioneer AVIC-F40BT

EUROPEAN IN-CAR AMPLIFIER 2012-2013

Alpine PDX-V9

EUROPEAN IN-CAR SPEAKER SYSTEM 2012-2013

Gladden Aerospace 165.2 Active

EUROPEAN IN-CAR SUBWOOFER 2012-2013

Audison Voce AV 10

EUROPEAN IN-CAR PROCESSOR 2012-2013

Helix C-DSP

EUROPEAN IN-CAR INTEGRATION 2012-2013

Mosconi Gladden dsp6to8

EUROPEAN IN-CAR HIGH-END 2012-2013

Ground Zero GZPW Reference 18 + GZPT Reference 28

Combined Award with Mobile Panel

EUROPEAN SMART CONNECTIVITY 2012-2013

JVC KW-NSX1

Mobile Panel

EUROPEAN MOBILE PHONE 2012-2013

Samsung Galaxy S III

EUROPEAN SOCIAL MEDIA PHONE 2012-2013

HTC One SEUROPEAN MOBILE PHOTO ACHIEVEMENT 2012-2013
Nokia PureView Pro Imaging Technology

EUROPEAN WIRELESS SPEAKERS 2012-2013

Philips Fidelio A9 (AW9000)

EUROPEAN MOBILE HEADPHONE 2012-2013

Focal Spirit One

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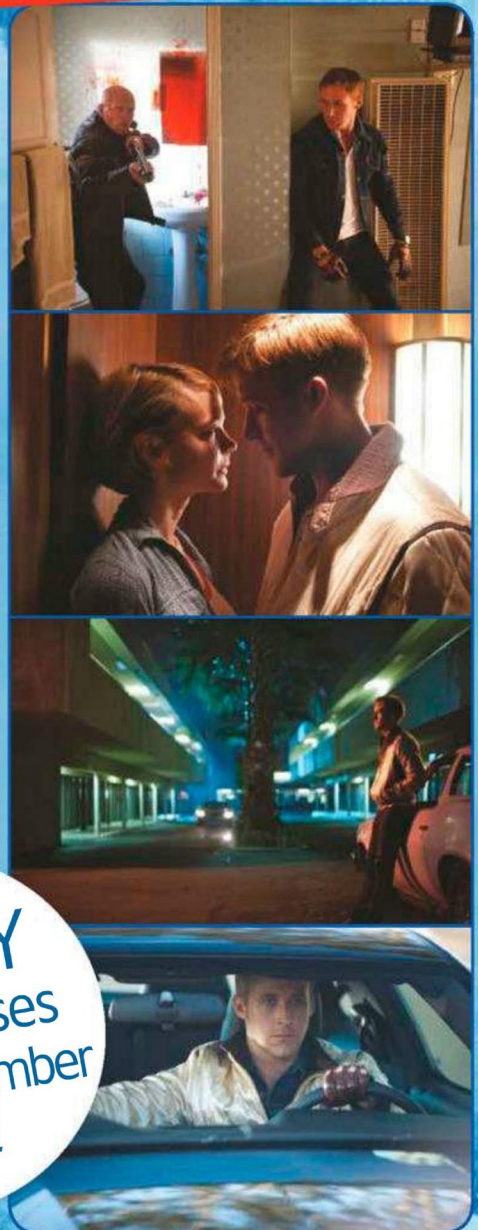
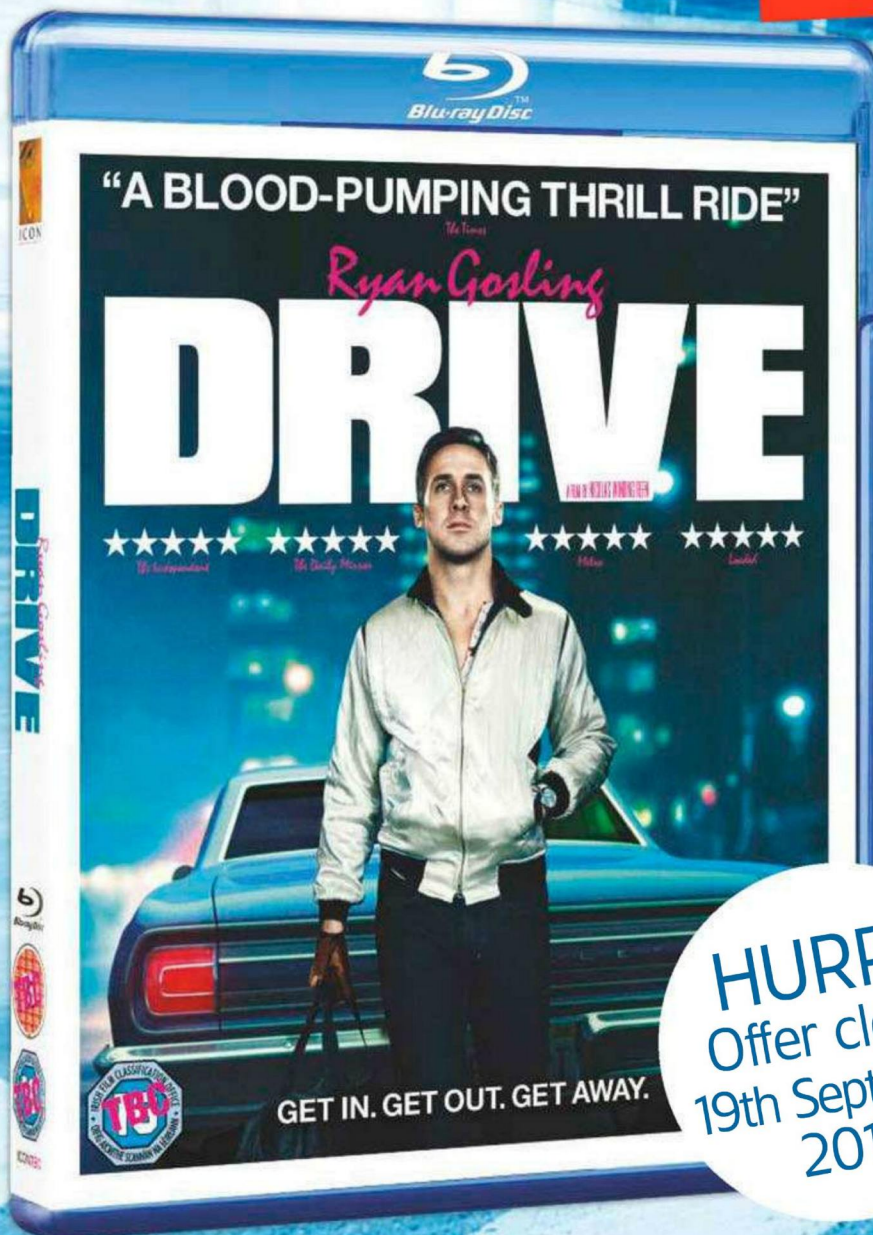
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SIM2 M.150 → £20,000 APPROX

HIGH END
HERO

A true high-end home cinema needs a premium projector at its heart. SIM2's new M.150 – the world's first Active Shutter LED projector – fits the bill perfectly. But it doesn't come cheap...



The M.150, from SIM2's Mico range, uses LED tech to craft its bigscreen images



'The M.150 is gloriously
weighty, generating extreme
confidence in the quality
of SIM2's engineering'





When we found our test rooms invaded by a glut of LED projectors a couple of years ago, we felt confident that LED lighting would soon dominate the projection world in the same way it's taken over the TV industry. But we were wrong. In fact, since then most of the big names in projector design have quietly but surely backed away from using LED.

At first glance it's difficult to fathom why. After all, LED lighting delivers some significant advantages, starting with the fact that while you have to change normal UHP lamps every 2,000-4,000 hours of use (at a cost of hundreds of pounds a time), LED lamps are rated to last an astonishing 30,000 hours.

Then there's the fact that, unlike standard lamps, LED systems suffer with practically no degradation in the quality of light they produce over the course of their huge lifespans. I'd further argue from past experience that LED lights deliver slightly more subtle, nuanced and naturally-coloured pictures than all but the very best standard-lamp projectors. Certainly, the colour range of the LED system inside SIM2's new M.150 projector is claimed to be 128 per cent NTSC – over 80 per cent more than you can achieve using conventional UHP setups.

Last, but certainly not least, LED systems use separate lamps for each of the red, green and blue colour elements, meaning you don't have to worry about the rainbow effect (colour striping) interference you usually suffer to some extent with single-chip DLP projectors.

Despite all these advantages, the M.150 is the only new LED projector I've seen in an age. And a clue to why this might be the case can be seen in the price: £20,000...

The thing is, using LED lamps in projectors is technically rather difficult. LEDs are hard to keep stable when running at high temperatures, and tricky to get much brightness out of – an issue that was apparent with SIM2's previous LED models, including the Mico 50 flagship.

In short, if you want to get the very best out of LED lamps in projectors, you need to place them in extremely high-quality optical systems. The sort of systems, in fact, that are SIM2's trademark.

Sublime design

Before I plunge into the M.150's premium features, it's worth mentioning the projector's sublime

design and build. Industrial designer Giorgio Revoldini has once again been roped in, and the result is something you might actually feel happy to put into a living room rather than a dedicated home cinema, courtesy of a glass finish applied to its blackened top and front, and moody-looking vents down each side. It's gloriously weighty too, generating extreme confidence in the quality of the innards.

Then there's the M.150's lens. This protrudes miles out of the centre of the projector's front edge, yet feels every bit as robust as the rest of the unit. The 'T1' standard lens attached to our review sample is not your only option, mind you. You can also get either a 0.675:1 short-throw lens or a 2.1-3.9:1 optional long-throw lens for large rooms. Maximum image size is rated at 250in, if you're lucky enough to be able to install a screen that huge.

The lens options are just the start of the outstanding installation flexibility the M.150 offers. For instance, you can also optically shift its image via the remote control over a huge distance: +60%/-25% vertically, or +/-8% horizontally. The standard lens offered plenty of optical zoom too, along with almost infinite degrees of focus finesse – something which is especially necessary on the M.150 to ensure that you get the maximum impact from its precision optics.

If you want even more evidence of the sort of setup features that distinguish high-end PJs from the mainstream, then check out the M.150's compatibility with the Live Colour Calibration software suite – a phenomenally precise, flexible and sophisticated system that enables your installer to get your M.150's colours tweaked to within a hair's breadth of perfection.

SIM2 has also introduced v2.0 of its EasyLED software specifically for the M.150, with particular attention being paid to LED's emission characteristics courtesy of dedicated colorimetric sensors.

As if this wasn't enough, the M.150 also supports auto-calibration. Here a built-in sensor in the optical path enables continual maintenance of the projector's colour gamut. This is critical, since it means the M.150 can always compensate for the way LED emissions change – especially where colour is concerned – with temperature and time.

The auto-calibration sensor wouldn't do much, of course, if it

John Archer specialises in TV and projector reviews – and is equally happy with a sub-£1,000 PJ as a reference-quality £20,000 beast. Well, almost





wasn't also backed up by some high-falutin' video processing. Happily, the M.150 employs the same top-flight electronics employed in SIM2's £30,000 Lumis 3D-S three-chip DLP model – processing which also covers the M.150's 3D playback and a variety of motion compensation systems.

Over the rainbow

The M.150 is only a single-chip DLP projector, but ultra fast-switching LEDs (an 8-bit-per-second high-speed current driver can switch off the 30A driving current to each LED in less than 1ms) means that it delivers a colour performance equivalent to a 20x colour wheel in a standard single-chip DLP projector. To put this in perspective, most single-chip DLP UHP lamps operate with 5x or 7x colour wheels – hence my assertion earlier that rainbow noise (which is connected to the colour wheel) shouldn't be an issue on the M.150 at all. When it comes to brightness, meanwhile, the M.150's 'Super PureLED Phlatlight' LED modules have been enhanced from those in the Mico 50 to deliver an extra 200 Lumens.

Premium tech is on hand for 3D viewing, too. As readers of our

previous reviews of SIM2's Nero and Lumis 3D-S modes will know, the Italian brand takes 3D very seriously. This continues with the M.150, which uses a so-called '2.5 flash' ultra-fast refresh function to combat the crosstalk ghosting problems often seen with Active 3D projectors. And the exceptional (up to 120Hz) operating rate achievable on the M.150 – which SIM2 claims is because it doesn't use any of the

'With 3D movies, our passion for the M.150 grows from infatuation to a full-blown love affair'

actuators found in most projectors – also enhances its contrast performance, allowing the internal Dynamic Black technology to deliver a claimed contrast ratio of 100,000:1.

Whole new level

Unleashed on a wide variety of my favourite Blu-rays (and starting with 2D), the M.150 gives a spectacular account of itself, as the addition of the extra brightness lifts LED projection to a whole new level.

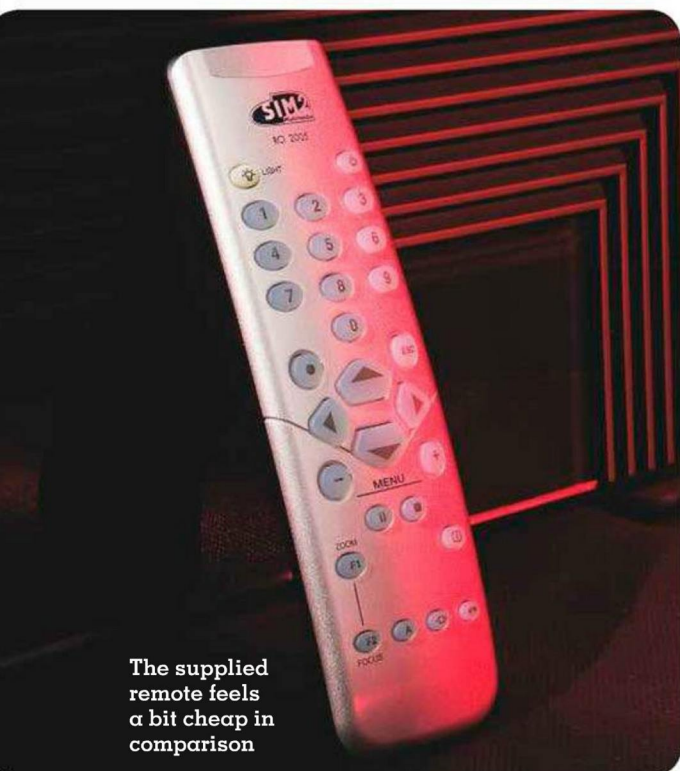
What's immediately apparent is the astounding precision with which the M.150 treats HD sources. I'm used to finding high-end projectors rendering colours with more finesse, details with more accuracy and edges with more sharpness than mid-range models – but the M.150 is exceptional in all these areas even by high-end standards.

During the detailed opening sequence to *The Dark Knight*, for instance, the M.150 does more justice to the extraordinary amounts of noise-free detail on the Blu-ray than any other projector in recent memory – aside from SIM2's own £30,000 Lumis 3D-S. Even the Nero models don't look quite as crisp and pure, probably on account of the LED model's freedom from any colour wheel interference.

Also playing a massive part in the phenomenal *...Dark Knight* image is the SIM2's accomplished balance of brightness and contrast. The light control the M.150 exhibits allows it to give pictures a sense of depth, crispness, space and sheer cinematic accuracy that should have your mouth hanging open in awe. The shots looking down the length of the bank that The Joker is raiding have just never looked better.



CI-friendly:
12V triggers
and an RS-232
port will aid
installation



The supplied
remote feels
a bit cheap in
comparison

The M150's light handling also leads to levels of shadow detail during dark scenes that you'll simply not see on any affordable projector – or even on many rival premium models. During the tricky Chapter 12 of *Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows Part 2* I could see subtle shades of colour and marginal levels of detail in the images of Voldemort's armies that typically aren't visible on normal TVs or projectors.

To put this remarkable contrast handling in perspective, a lack of shadow detail is certainly one weakness of Sony's otherwise terrific £17,000 VW1000ES 4K-resolution SXRD projector, one of the M150's main rivals.

Turning next to colours, the enormous range of tones and the finesse with which the M150 can render even the most minimal of blends means pictures look so lifelike you'd swear you could step through the screen and join the action. Though preferably not becoming part of *The Joker's* ill-fated heist crew...

Poetry in motion

Once I'd digested all the aforementioned strengths, it occurred to me that the M150 is equally outstanding when it comes to motion handling. Objects, people and camera pans – even without using any of the provided processing tools (which do make the image look slightly processed) – cross the

screen with remarkable sharpness and no more judder than seems natural with movie material.

With 3D Blu-rays, my passion for the M150 grows from deep infatuation to a full-blown love affair. During run-throughs of *Tangled* and *Pirates Of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*, hi-def 3D images are supremely detailed, full of depth (without looking forced) and completely free of crosstalk. And when I say completely, I mean it.

The increased brightness over the brand's previous LED projectors also reaps great benefits with 3D. There's plenty of punch, shadow detail and colour vibrancy here.

On our wishlist

Believe it or not, I still reckon the M150 could be improved in a couple of areas. Black levels just aren't as deep as those of JVC's (more affordable) X70 and X90 – although you do get more shadow detail in return. Also, it runs a bit noisily – something for your installer to worry about – and it feels stingy that you don't get either the 3D transmitter or any 3D glasses included in the M150's £20,000 ticket. Instead you'll need to find an extra £750 to bag a transmitter and four pairs of glasses. Which is kinda like splashing out on a Rolls Royce and being asked to pay extra for the windscreen wiper.

Finally, the standard remote control that SIM2 ships with the M150 is depressingly lightweight and poorly laid out, with the onscreen menus also looking drab and not feeling intuitive to navigate. But I suppose there's a good chance that any M150 will be installed as part of a much wider and rather posh AV system, complete with an entirely separate touchscreen control system.

None of the negatives above are likely to present any significant stumbling block to a high-end AV fan. Couple its imperious performance with the fact that you'll probably never need to replace its lamps throughout its lifetime and you get something of a long-term bargain.

Yet there is one problem lurking in the background for buyers of premium projectors – 4K video. Not a mass-market native 4K standard (that's still years away) but upscaled 4K. Sony's VPL-VW1000ES has shown its benefits and it could be that high-end manufacturers – SIM2 included – will follow suit. Should you hold off from splurging £20,000 a while? That's up to you. If you do get the M150, you'll love it ●

→ Specifications

3D: yes Active Shutter

Full HD: yes 1,920 x 1,080

Connections: composite video input; 2 x v1.4 HDMI; component video input; S-Video input; D-Sub PC input; Ethernet; 2 x USB inputs; RS-232 port; hard remote port; 2 x 12V trigger outputs

Brightness (claimed): 1,000 ANSI Lumens

Contrast ratio (claimed): 100,000:1 (dynamic)

Dimensions: 420(w) x 220(h) x 531(d)mm

Weight: 28kg

Features: Live Colour Calibration software compatible; multiple lens options available; autocalibration sensor; 30,000-hour claimed lamp life; PureMovie/PureMotion 2D/PureMotion 3D motion processing; LED lighting; high-end processing and optics



HCC VERDICT

Sim2 M150 → £20,000 → Supplier: www.sim2.co.uk → Tel: 01825 750850

Highs: Stunning 2D and 3D picture quality; very long lamp life; smart design

Lows: It runs slightly noisily; black levels could be a touch deeper; costs £20,000

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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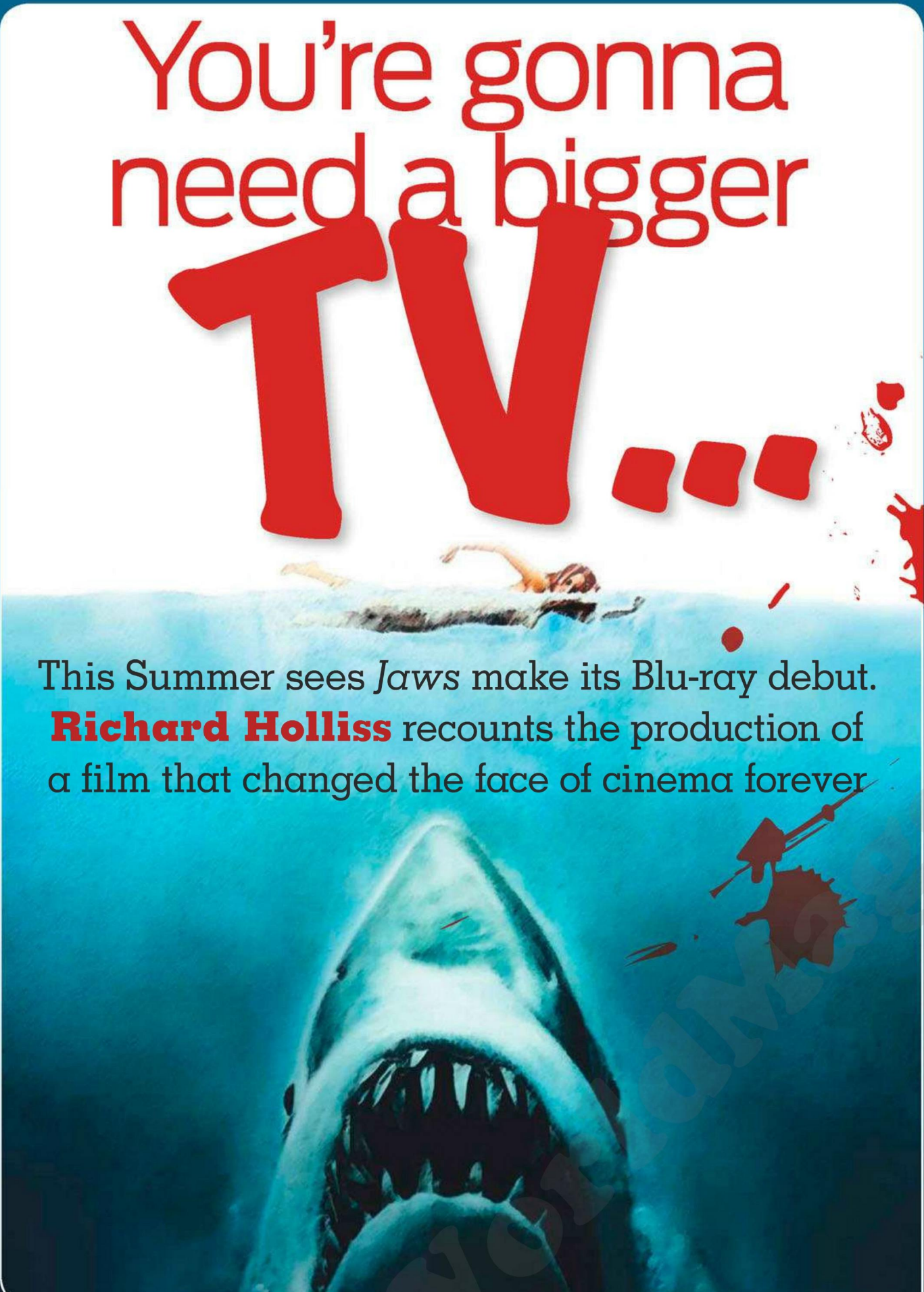
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This Summer sees *Jaws* make its Blu-ray debut. **Richard Holliss** recounts the production of a film that changed the face of cinema forever

The sign in the fishmonger's window read 'Get your own back on Jaws – eat a fish today.'

This was back in 1975, when the entire world from shopkeepers to office workers was talking about a new kind of movie phenomenon. In an amazingly short period of time, a seemingly innocuous thriller about a shark attack on a New England coastal resort had taken the film world by storm and made a household name of 28-year-old director Steven Spielberg.

With hindsight and some 37 years of sequels, imitators and parodies, it's hard to believe that *Jaws* – such a perfect blending of story, script and characterisation – could so easily have been a disaster in the making. To make matters worse, prior to the film's release its fledgling director's only claim to fame (apart from some episodes of *Columbo* and *Night Gallery*) was the low-budget TV movie, *Duel*. In retrospect, critics have trumpeted this tale of a lone driver being menaced by a giant truck as a sign of the filmmaker's exceptional talent, yet during its original airing it had been largely ignored. After *Jaws*, though, no one would ignore Spielberg again...

Something fishy going on

The story behind *Jaws* begins a long way from the ocean, in the mind of novelist Peter Benchley. Even before it was published, Benchley's tale of a shark attack at a beach resort was snapped up by producers Richard D Zanuck and David Brown (*The Sting*) for \$175,000. And with the book rights secured, Benchley was invited to write the first draft of the screenplay, but the script was to go through many rewrites up to filming and beyond. By this time Spielberg (who'd just wrapped *The Sugarland Express*) had been brought onboard.

Spielberg immediately saw a similarity in the theme of the story to the one he had explored in *Duel* – for him, the shark was as relentless and merciless as the diabolical truck had been – yet felt that the script lacked humour and called upon comedy writer Carl Gottlieb to work on the latest draft. Even so, by the time production started on the movie in May 1974, the screenplay was still unfinished. Actor Richard Dreyfuss, who played 'shark expert' Matt Hooper in the film, later remarked that they started shooting 'without a script, without a cast and without a shark.'

This is only a slight exaggeration, as the casting process had been far from plain sailing. With *Jaws* coming in the wake of bigscreen disaster-themed movies (the 1970s had already given us an upside-down ocean liner, an earthquake-struck metropolis and an office block engulfed in flames), Universal Studios considered heavyweight actor Charlton Heston as the film's unlikely hero, Brody, but the part eventually went to Roy Scheider. The key role of Quint, the Captain Ahab-type mariner, was offered to, and turned down by, Lee Marvin. Robert Shaw, who eventually played the shark-hunter, was initially uninterested having disliked the novel. Richard Dreyfuss, meanwhile, refused the role of Hooper, but quickly changed his mind when he thought that his performance in the movie *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* would spell the end of a promising career.

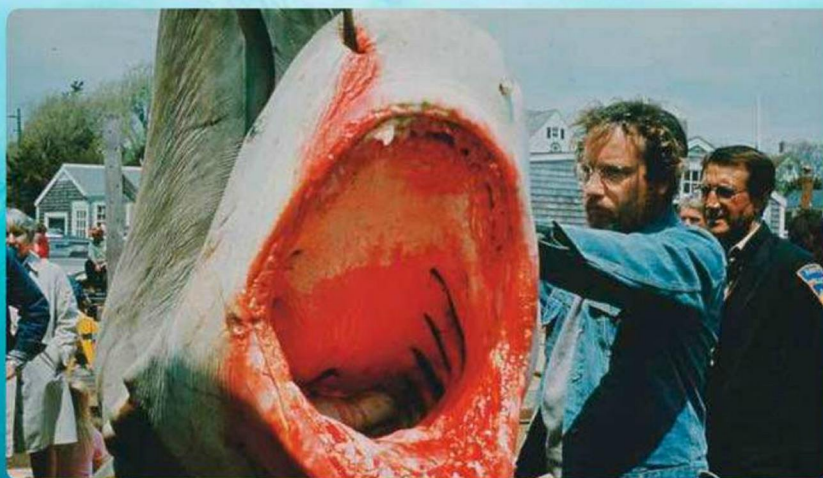
While casting was being finalised, Zanuck and Brown secured the island of Martha's Vineyard in

'Universal considered heavyweight actor Charlton Heston as Brody, the film's unlikely hero'

Extras: The hordes of beach-goers were mainly Martha's Vineyard natives



The new Blu-ray (below right) had to be colour-corrected, considering the condition of the original negative (below)



The sons of Jaws

When Hollywood gets an idea, it sticks with it

Grizzly (1976)

Replace a 26ft Great White with a 15ft Grizzly bear, move the action to Alaska and *voilà!*
Monster rating: 3/5

Orca (1977)

The eponymous Killer Whale headbutts a Great White in this shameless *Jaws* rip-off
Monster rating: 2/5

Piranha (1978)

Joe 'Gremlins' Dante cut his teeth on this *Jaws*-inspired horror produced by Roger Corman
Monster rating: 4/5

Alligator (1980)

Robert Forster saves the citizens of Chicago from a ravenous, over-sized alligator
Monster rating: 4/5

Razorback (1984)

A rampaging pig doesn't sound too scary, but director Russell Mulcahy brings home the bacon
Monster rating: 3/5

Deep Blue Sea (1999)

More flesh-hungry sharks, but now they're super-intelligent. Can Samuel L. Jackson stop 'em?
Monster rating: 2/5

Crocodile (2000)

More proof that director Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was a bit of a fluke
Monster rating: 1/5

Rogue (2007)

There are effective shocks aplenty in this recent Aussie thriller starring Sam Worthington
Monster rating: 5/5

Massachusetts as the location backdrop, with the close-knit community of white-painted houses doubling as the fictional seaside town of Amity. The residents of this New England hamlet were not overly enthusiastic about the Hollywood invasion, although the publicity that they received as a consequence of the movie turned a moderately successful seaside resort into a holidaymaker's paradise, albeit a crowded one.

One advantage of Martha's Vineyard was the shallow ocean (a mere 30 feet to the seabed) which stretched for miles. This was deemed the perfect environment (in those pre-CGI days) to control the mechanical effects needed to create the film's villain, a 26-foot-long Great White shark. Even though there was a staggering amount of documentary footage of these in the wild, Spielberg wanted his monster to interact with his actors – and even jump onto a boat – and that meant building his own artificial version.

Troublesome trio

In all, three full-size sharks were constructed for the movie in the lead-up to the shooting. The largest was mounted on a gimbal that the special effects technicians believed could be raised and lowered in the water from a static position on the seabed. The other two had either the left or right-hand side (away from the camera) removed, in order to house the complex pneumatics that was needed to operate the tail, fins and jaws.

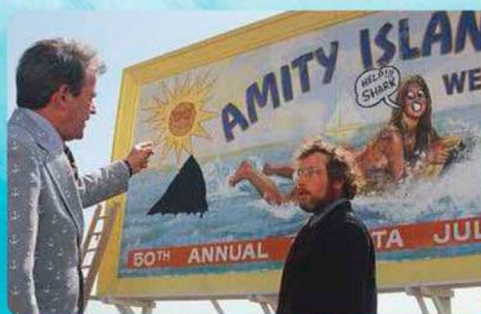
Unfortunately, these giant 'puppets' constantly became water-logged or just broke down completely. Nicknamed 'Bruce' after Spielberg's lawyer Bruce Raimer, most of the credit when they actually worked fell to the art director Joe Alves and veteran special effects ace Bob Matthey, who

had masterminded the spectacular battle with a giant squid in Walt Disney's 1954 adaptation of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

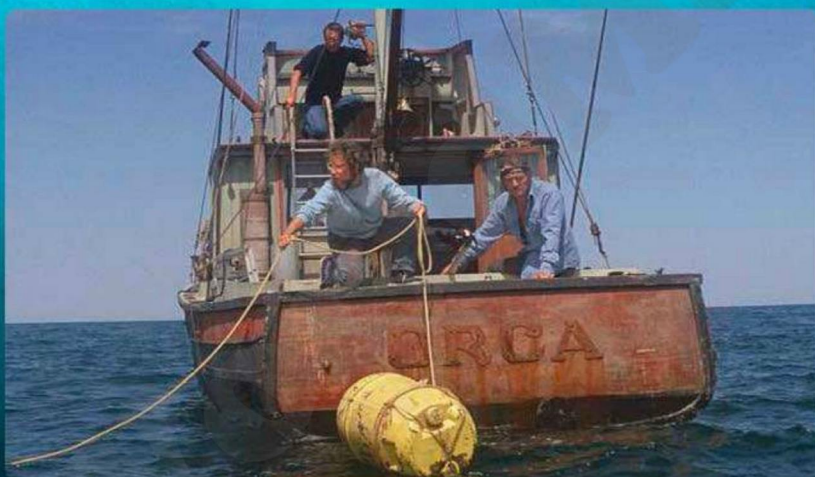
Yet the disappointing behaviour of the mechanical sharks actually contributed to the film in a way that Spielberg hadn't originally planned. It allowed the director (as Hitchcock had done in films such as *The Birds* and *Frenzy*) to hint at the dangers, and use the camera's POV as the shark's eyes, with just a fin flashing into view as people are seen being devoured in a fountain of blood. This economy of production remained in use even throughout the film's shark-heavy second half, with the beast's increasingly violent and unseen attacks leaving more to the audiences imagination than the filmmakers had dared to hope.

And, when 'Bruce' was cajoled into putting in an actual appearance, such as the sequence where Scheider is chumming at the back of the boat and the shark suddenly thrusts its giant snout out of the water, or the slightly less effective appearance in the denouement when it chows down on Robert Shaw's squirming torso, the mechanical shark proved that those earlier non-appearances had prepared the audience like nothing else could, and provoked sheer terror. And the success of Spielberg's device for keeping the shark under wraps through most of the movie didn't allow the audience to see the creature as anything other than a menace to be destroyed. Unlike King Kong, the shark was emotionless and predatory – so no one felt sorry for it when it got blown to pieces in the film's thrilling climax.

The problems with the mechanical sharks were just the tip of the iceberg. Bouts of seasickness, changing currents that forced the repositioning of camera boats and actors before shooting could



Filming in the ocean, rather than in a water tank, posed numerous problems



Spielberg on Blu

More back catalogue titles are on the way

E.T: The Extra Terrestrial (1982)

Spielberg's family-friendly sci-fi will crashland on Blu-ray on October 22. Look out for the Limited Edition Spaceship version

Indiana Jones Trilogy (1981/1984/1989)

Available in a box set (with the previously released... *Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, too), the first three Indy flicks make their Blu-ray debut on October 8

Catch Me If You Can (2002)

Spielberg's con artist comedy-drama, starring Leonard DiCaprio, is rumoured to be getting a BD release this December

Schindler's List (1993)

Another Universal title scheduled for a 2012 Blu-ray release as part of its centennial celebrations. No fixed date yet, though

Empire of the Sun (1987)

A 25th Anniversary edition was originally slated for June, but has been knocked back for an unspecified reason

begin, and the crew's sinking feeling that they were never going to see home again – now that the movie was 100 days over schedule – created animosity on the set. So much so, that Spielberg said in later interviews that he was convinced the crew wanted to throw him overboard.

Ocean-going concern

When the gruelling shoot was finally over after a total of 159 days, and nearly twice over budget, there was still work to be done back in Los Angeles. All the scenes of Hooper's character being attacked in the shark cage were shot in a giant water tank at the MGM Studios in Culver City. Additional footage for the cage sequence was being filmed in Australia, with a midget stuntman doubling for the Dreyfuss character, in order that the real-life sharks looked as gigantic as their fictional counterparts.

During post-production John Williams added his atmospheric score. His 'shark theme' – an alternating pattern of just two notes – would evoke a nightmarish feeling of foreboding, become synonymous with any approaching danger and be imitated constantly in the following years. Williams had scored box-office hits *Earthquake* for Universal and *The Towering Inferno* for Fox/Warner, but it was to be his collaboration with Spielberg that relaunched his career and put original film music back in the charts.

Jaws eventually swam into cinemas in the US on June 20, with the studio confident it had a major hit on its hands despite the laboured production. Preview screenings had proved audiences' appetites for being scared witless. A massive marketing campaign accompanied it, spanning TV and radio advertising, the book tie-in

and various *Jaws*-themed merchandise. This is commonplace now, of course, but in 1975 it was a new strategy. Spielberg's monster movie became the pioneer of the Summer blockbuster. So when you look at your multiplex's listings and see nothing on offer but big-budget 'tentpole' pictures, you know who to blame.

Smash hit

As soon as it was released, *Jaws* reaped critical and commercial praise. The opening weekend return of \$7m nearly recouped its overblown \$9m budget. It then raced to become the first picture to break the \$100m barrier, and was the highest-grossing movie ever until *Star Wars* arrived two years later. Academy Awards for best sound, editing and score followed in 1976.

Sequels naturally followed, but without involvement from Spielberg; the surprisingly entertaining *Jaws 2* in 1978; the passable stereoscopic *Jaws 3-D* in 1983 and the unmitigatingly awful *Jaws: The Revenge* in 1987.

And then there are the imitators, featuring all manner of leviathans such as giant alligators, dinosaur-type fish and piranhas. Even the latest tale of nasty aquatic monsters, *Piranha 3DD*, spoofs Spielberg's much talked about 'forward, tracking, zoom out' shot from *Jaws* (a clever in-camera effect previously used in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* and even the 1960s TV series *The Avengers*).

Now *Jaws* is back on a much-anticipated Blu-ray release, and could be set to break records all over again. And the story of its troubled pre-production has long been swallowed up by its phenomenal success – and iconic stature as the most original movie event of all-time ●



Some frames in the original negative were badly damaged (above left), but have been painstakingly restored by Universal's digital technicians



Sharp attack

Michael Daruty, Senior VP, Technical Operations at Universal Studios, chats to Anton van Beek about the process of restoring **Jaws** for Blu-ray...

Anton van Beek: Which source elements have been used for this new restoration?

Michael Daruty: We evaluated all of our existing material, including the original negatives, interpositives, and dupe negatives to determine what would give us the best quality. We did testing in 4K against all of those materials and the original camera negative turned out to give us the highest resolution as a source. That said, they were still in fair-to-poor condition, with multiple scratches, heavy-to-moderate dirt and some perf damage. But we were able to fix things either through the wet gate process – which fills in some of the scratches – or using our digital tools.

AvB: And what source had been used for the previous DVD releases?

MD: The 35mm interpositive is usually the source that is used for video transfers as they will have already gone through a wet gate process. But because we wanted to get the highest resolution, and because we were doing work in a 4K environment, we went from the original negative in this case.

AvB: What are the practical benefits of working in a 4K environment?

MD: We're working in a much higher resolution than we would be if we were just working in a HD environment. The reason we did this is because this is a full film restoration where we went through frame-by-frame and restored the original negative back to its pristine source. And then we have the ability to output a new digital negative, create digital cinema prints as well as our Blu-ray. So everything came from that 4K original.

AvB: Were you surprised by the condition of the negatives when you started working with them?

MD: No, we were already fairly familiar with the damage in the original negatives. Our digital technicians within the Universal Digital Services group then worked to balance out the colour, remove whatever dirt and scratches were

remaining after the wet gate scan and repair any film damage. All on a shot-by-shot basis, while trying to retain the original look of the film.

AvB: How involved was Steven Spielberg during the restoration process?

MD: Steven's always very good about making himself available. Our usual process with him is to bring him in at key points to get his opinion on how the look is going and highlight anything of interest to him. And, of course, we bring him in at the end as well for final approvals.

AvB: Did he make any changes to the film at all, or is this exactly as it would have looked on its original cinema release?

MD: Overall he was very happy with the high-resolution transfer and how we matched the original. However, he had a few minor changes when it comes to brightness and colour on a couple of shots – one of those being Chrissie in the water in the opening. He had us lighten that up a little bit because there was so much more detail that you can get out of the picture today compared to previous versions.

AvB: Talking about recapturing the original filmic look, I suppose this is a good time to talk about grain retention – something that Universal has come in for a lot of flak over the years...

MD: Film has grain and we don't want it to be non-existent. But we also don't want grain to be a distraction. As we go back and work in these high-resolution environments with these older elements we have to figure out how to manage grain better. But we are very sensitive to how we manage grain. We don't want to manage it to the point where there are artefacts or it flattens out the look or it gives it more of a video look than a film look. But in certain cases, where we have excess grain, we literally are doing it on a cut-by-cut basis and are making our decision based on that. Films that we put out recently like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* have all been through some form of grain management and we're very happy with the outcome.



Digital diva:
Universal Studios'
Michael Daruty



Check out our in-depth review of the *Jaws* Blu-ray on page 120

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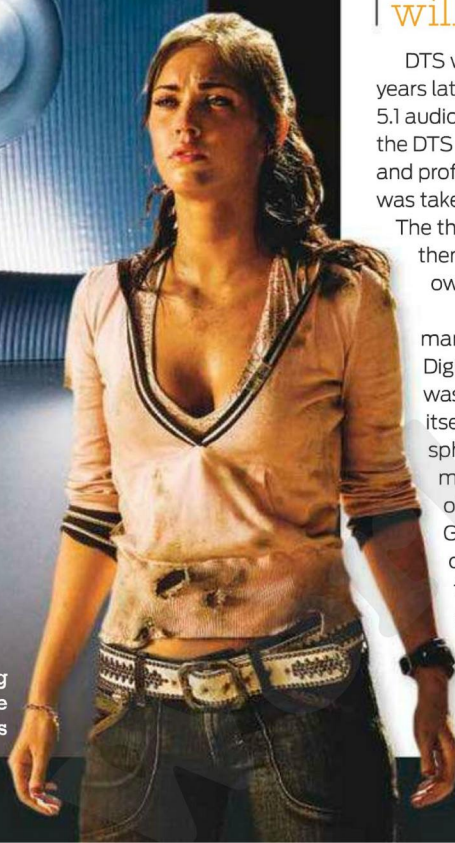
CINEMA



The company that brought high-performance audio to cinemas has now launched a processor for home enthusiasts. **Steve May** lifts the lid on Datasat Digital Entertainment



The RS20i aims to bring the pro-cinema experience to our own systems



We all aspire to have cinematic sound in our homes. And there are plenty of ways to get it, from budget surround sound boxes to premium processors. Some are rubbish, many are excellent, but all have a lineage that's instantly recognisable as domestic.

But now there's a different option. A cinema sound processor ripped from the racks of your local multiplex and engineered with a philosophy hewn from years of widescreen experience. Introducing the imposing RS20i from Datasat Digital Entertainment.

Admittedly, Datasat may not be a moniker instantly associated with bigscreen soundtracks, but it has a heritage that literally stretches back to the prehistory of digital movie audio, specifically Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*. AV aficionados will know that this movie ushered in DTS audio. It's also where the Datasat Digital Entertainment story begins...

Upstart audio

Back in 1993, with funding provided principally by Universal Studios, upstart cinema audio company Digital Theatre Systems (aka DTS), convinced wunderkind director Spielberg that its new multichannel digital sound format would be the perfect fit for his proto dino-epic *Jurassic Park*. With Universal's backing, DTS (then just a handful of people) shipped and installed 876 DTS playback systems into US cinemas in time for *JP*'s opening. The sound of cinema (and for that matter, the stomp of a T-Rex) changed forever.

'Datasat's RS20i is uniquely future-proof. This is not a box that technology will leave behind'

DTS went from strength to strength. Three years later, it reached into the home, bringing its 5.1 audio codec to DVD and other platforms. Soon the DTS empire sprawled across both consumer and professional cinema markets and the decision was taken to split it into two separate divisions.

The theatrical outfit, DTS Digital Cinema, was then sold in 2008 to Datasat's entrepreneurial owner Phil Emmel.

Under new stewardship, but retaining many of the original engineers, Datasat Digital Entertainment (the DTS branding was dropped in 2011) has gone on to carve itself a unique space in the pro-cinema sphere. Inevitably, many will consider its move into the consumer arena something of a leap. However, sales manager Daniel Gray thinks it was inevitable: 'We've constantly had people asking why our flagship processor, the AP20, wasn't available to AV enthusiasts.'

Stephen Field is Senior VP of programs and products. 'We've got about 30,000 installs out there for cinema playback,' he told HCC, when >

we dropped into the brand's Twyford base to learn more. 'Over the years we've diversified into hard drive products and media playback. We also oversee subtitling, audio descriptions and non-English language dubs.' Field takes us to see a German version of *Rock of Ages* being checked. 'We've also produced many cinema processors in our time,' he adds, 'but the AP20 was our first high-end processor.'

The AP20 was a revolutionary creation. Designed with audiophile sensibility, it utilises six Sharc DSPs ('at the time the fastest we could get') and all its features and functionality are software-based. 'That way it's easy for us to upgrade.' Indeed, it's this versatility that has made the AP20 an industry staple and a firm favourite of Hollywood's creative elite.

'I've done many film festivals,' recounts Field, 'sitting with directors doing EQ and alignment right up to the day of a premiere – a film is never finished mixing when it comes to the director. [James] Cameron will sit there asking for a centre channel to be up one dB at 1Khz, tweaking the left surround a bit louder, so that it sounds perfect in that particular theatre. Using an AP20, I can save his modifications as a Profile. When you want to run a regular movie, you just run the reference curve again on a separate preset. The system, with its ability to store 20 individual profiles and EQ settings, is very versatile.'

The new RS20i, a direct development from the AP20, shares much of this flexibility. What works in a commercial theatre also lends itself to home use. A multiplicity of profiles, designed to cope with different content in the cinema environment, translates to presets which can be assigned to different content sources and types (BD, Xbox, online, etc). Adding extra potency is built-in Dirac Live room-optimisation technology, which optimises both impulse and stationary frequency response. Not that the user needs to worry about this. An installer will turn up with a laptop and mic and make all the requisite measurements. Owners just have to press a button as and when. 'The RS20i is not overtly complicated, it's just feature rich,' we're told.

The processor has 31-band EQ and parametric EQ on all 16 channels, explains



Man with a plan: Datasat's Senior VP of programs and products, Stephen Field



Field. 'And we can do any of them at the same time, all overlaid. These are not DSP effects, like "Hall". You can make changes as you want and then save them. If you're an audiophile, you can really fine-tune the sound to exactly how you want it.'

High-end components

The RS20i is a good deal larger than the average audio separate and some 5cm deeper than its cinematic sibling, to accommodate a beefier power supply. There are other differences between the two units, too. 'We've changed the main system boards,' confides Field, 'along with the op amps and the capacitors. We've gone for higher-end components to make this product sound the best it can.'

The fascia is dominated by a large touchscreen, while power and USB input are hidden behind a Datasat logo badge. USB is used for loading and saving profiles. Typically, an installer will back everything up once the RS20i has been installed, to ensure that all setup data and profiles can be easily restored if required.

Unlike rivals high-end processors, the RS20i conforms to the full 16-channel DCP (Digital Cinema Package – the collection of files that go to make up a digital movie) specification mandated by the DCI (Digital Cinema Initiatives), and has four HDMI v1.4a inputs (video is passed through untouched), plus assorted digital and analogue inputs. The unit also uses a slot-in board architecture; there are three expansion bays for future product enhancements. While we were there, the company was finalising the Dolby board,

Fully-featured:

The forthcoming RS20i features a full-colour front display, USB input for loading and saving profiles and digital and analogue audio inputs



which will add Dolby TrueHD decoding (and everything beneath) to the box.

While DTS and Dolby were famously once fierce rivals, solid bridges have been built between the brands. 'We were competitors when we did the old 35mm film sound formats, but those days are over. We're agnostic now.'

Velvet glove

In full flight, the RS20i sounds magnificent. Once a room has been optimised with Dirac, the audio fits like a velvet glove. A demo of *Transformers* proves scintillating. Even with the sound mix at its most frenetic, no clarity or image placement is lost – and LFE slams hard and fast. The RS20i offers extensive bass management, with the capacity to feed four subs. It's at this point you realise just what the RS20i's setup versatility can achieve. That £16,000 price tag doesn't seem that big of an ask anymore.

Of course, the RS20i's price bracket already includes high-end multichannel processors, including the QSC DCP100 and the ADA Cinema Rhapsody Mach IV, but only the RS20i is DCI-compliant from a channel point of view.

And if you're an RS20i user, Datasat is promising a First Class rather than Premium Economy experience. 'We have a software team in the States, and we're dynamic. If we receive a specific request for a new feature from a user, we can add it to our development timeline.'

Field recalls a cry for help from the National Media Museum in Bradford, which runs an AP20. 'They handle everything at the NMM – IMAX, 35mm, 70mm and every old format going. But they had the need for a particular channel configuration for an obscure vintage movie which wasn't supported out of the box. We received a request over the phone, sent it to our engineers in Los Angeles, and it was processed overnight and installed into the National Media Museum's AP20 in time for their screening. No other company can react like that!'

Intriguingly, the RS20i has spawned its own offshoot, the SR16. This model is tailored to the burgeoning nightclub scene. 'Dirac optimisation solves lots of problems in nightclubs,' says Datasat owner Phil Emmel. 'Nightclubs have multiple zones to accommodate – VIP areas, table areas, the club and bars, and they want to have different EQs per zone, different levels with control over different sources. At the moment, these clubs need various bits of kit to achieve that but, with Dirac 2 software, you accommodate different zones into one profile. These customers also want their own front panel, with their own logo on it. Having the manufacturing here and in the US makes it easy for more to customise the product.'

The RS20i's construction makes it uniquely future-proof. This is not a box that technology will leave behind. The Datasat Digital Entertainment group are already heavily involved in next-generation cinema sound formats, and are



confident they will bring these experiences to the home before anyone else.

With 16 channels of customisable sound, the RS20i looks to be the only consumer audio processor which has the potential to be upgraded to a next-generation movie sound format. Significant, as a war to decide this sonic future is already underway.

New direction

This Summer, Dolby launches Atmos, its new state-of-the-art cinema

sound system, in the UK. This not only adds two height arrays and extended side-channels to the usual multichannel configuration, but introduces the concept of object-based sound design to moviemaking for the first time. Every element in a frame can become a separate sound object. The end result is 'an illusion of an infinite number of speakers.' The first feature to be mixed in Atmos is *Brave*, from Disney Pixar – the forward-thinking company that also launched the first 7.1 cinema mix for *Toy Story 3*.

Elsewhere Barco is promoting its own system, Auro 11.1. Both of these deeply immersive audio systems are an inevitable upgrade after the growing deployment of 4K digital cinema projectors, says Field, and they offer a quantum leap in aural performance.

Working closely with Barco, Datasat has developed the AP243D, a 24-channel audio processor for Auro 11.1. Also involved are THX, on hand to optimise Auro 11.1 systems as they roll-out into commercial theatres. The first film mixed for the format is George Lucas' World War Two action adventure *Red Tails*. Rick Dean, Senior vice president of THX, describes the Barco proposition as 'a groundbreaking, yet logical next step for THX.'

'With Auro 11.1 whatever is on a track, stays on that track. It doesn't vary. Nothing gets added or taken away from it,' explains Field. Datasat reveals it's also working with Barco to produce a slot-in Auro 11.1 card for the AP20, and there's no reason why a comparable board can't be developed for the RS20i, when domestic software becomes available. 'We're also talking to other 3D sound vendors. We've got a lot of horsepower in this box.'

At present, neither of these next-gen sound proponents are courting the home entertainment industry with their 3D audio technologies. They're being positioned as a theatrical only experience, one which cinema chains can use to lure punters from the comfort of their home theatres. But never say never, teases Field. The future of cinema sound begins here.

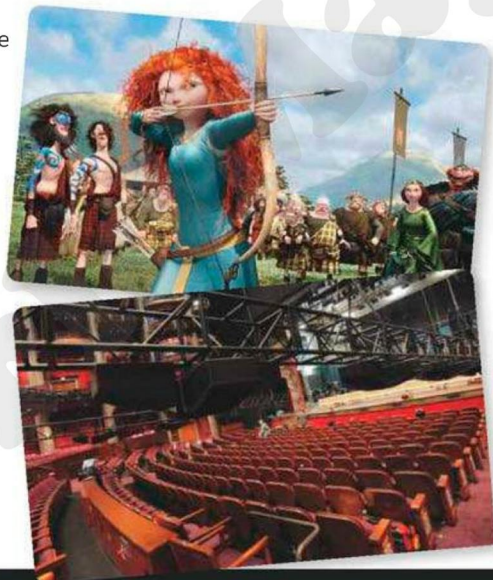
Made in the UK

High Wycombe: the home of high-end home cinema sound...

Given the preponderance of Far Eastern manufacturing, it's perhaps surprising to learn that Datasat audio processors are being built in the UK, but as the company's owner Phil Emmel tells it: 'To expand our US manufacturing operation, we have opened an additional manufacturing plant in the UK and US. There's a recession on and everyone's got to do their bit about putting the great back into Great Britain, so I've brought manufacturing capability to the UK.'

Emmel recently signed a contract to start production of both the AP20 and RS20i processors at a factory in Bourne End, outside of High Wycombe. 'By doing this it actually helps us greatly with things such as meeting increased customer demand and greater flexibility for bespoke items.'

Immersive: Disney Pixar's *Brave* has been mixed in Dolby Atmos – but cinemas need an overhaul to deliver it



Eastern promises

→ Kit checklist

SIM2: Lumis 3DS projector
SmX: 3.5m Promask Constant Width acoustically transparent projection screen
Anthem: Statement D2v processor; 3 x Statement P5 amplifiers; 1 x Statement P2 amplifier
Artcoustic: 3 x Spitfire LCR speakers (tri-amped); 4 x Spitfire subwoofers; 4 x Artcoustic surround speakers
Kaleidescape: Server system
Apple: Apple TV
Crestron: TPS-6X touchpanel controller; Digital Media matrix
Cineak: Vedette seats

Mark Craven

marvels at a dedicated room with some serious hardware

It's good to know that even with all the sand, sea and sunshine in Dubai, people still find the time (and money) to indulge their home cinema fantasies – and in the case of the owner of this purpose-built theatre, those fantasies include mammoth-sized 3D visuals and 17 channels of sound.

Despite being in the Middle East, the work on this system was undertaken by Manchester and London-based install company Custom Controls, with a little help from some local engineers. The finished project provides high-end HD visuals for up to eight people.

It's a fine example of a stealth setup, with all the speakers coming from on-wall specialist Artcoustic and smart integration of lighting and decor. For instance, one touch of a button on the Crestron touchpad fires up the projector and amplifiers, dims the lights and opens the front-of-house curtain.

Of course, with a 3.5m projector screen taking up so much room, there's no space for on-wall speakers across the front. This is why the far wall is actually a false wall – providing space behind the screen to house the LCR speakers and quartet(!) of subwoofers. The room's trapagon shape (one end is smaller than the other) helps optimise sound reflections.

Sources include Blu-rays and DVDs stored on a Kaleidescape system, satellite TV and Apple TV. All are routed through SIM2's cost-no-object Lumis 3DS projector.

The owner of this premium picture palace room is apparently making use of it on an almost daily basis. Why are we not surprised?

Onyx table lamps add another layer of lighting chic



Room essentials

A Movies on demand

Sources in this eight-seater setup include a Kaleidescape server, satellite TV and Apple TV, meaning the owner should never be short of content, including his personal favourite – Blu-ray concerts

B Behind the scenes

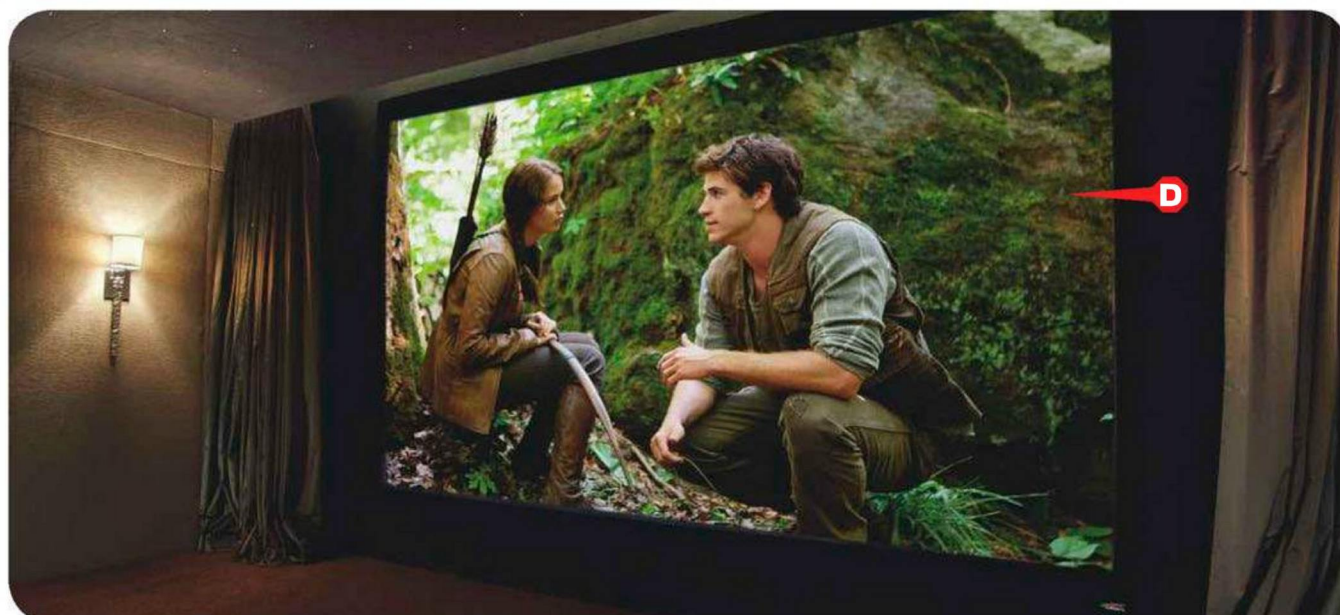
The projector wall is custom-built – behind it is a cavity that houses the front soundstage speakers and helps integrate the motorized curtains and cinema lighting

C At your fingertips

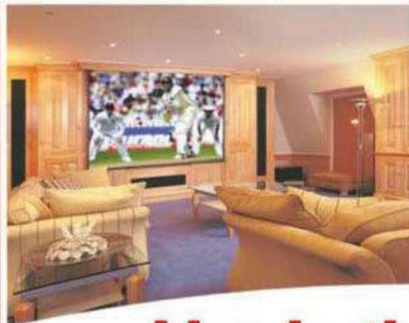
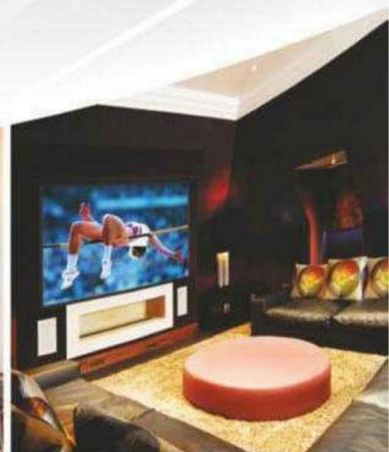
A Crestron TPS-6X wireless touchscreen remote provides simplified control of the room's electronics, lighting and air-conditioning

D Super-size SIM2

The massive 3.5m screen works in conjunction with SIM2's ultra-high-end Lumis 3DS projector



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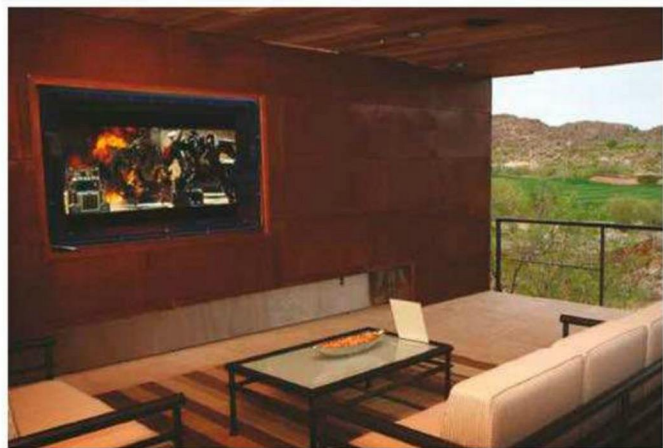
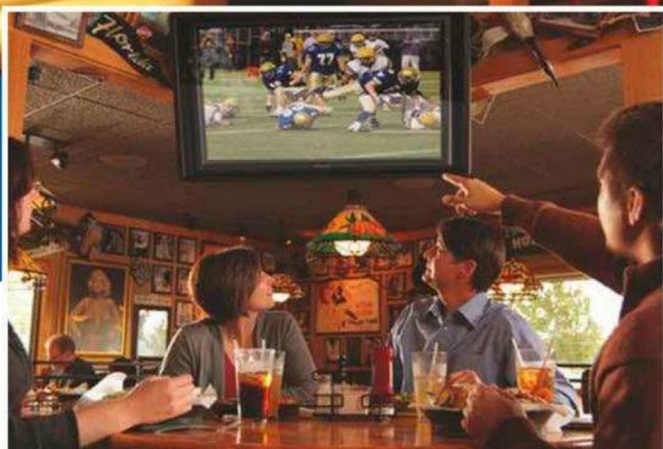
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DIGITAL COPY

Mark Craven discovers that our European neighbours share our passions for home cinema – even though they don't get the same VOD services

Some of you may have noticed that this issue of *Home Cinema Choice* has a new addition. For the first time, we're publishing the annual EISA awards, having become a member earlier this year.

The European Imaging and Sound Association was founded in 1982. At that time, it comprised five magazines devoted to photography, and issued just one award, the 'Camera of the Year'. Now, 30 years later, its membership extends to 50 specialist magazines, drawn from 19 European countries, covering six categories – audio, home theatre, video, mobile devices, in-car electronics and photography. Each year, those magazines get together to bicker, argue and debate the CE market and finalise the awards (turn to p17 to see who wins!).

What I've found interesting from my initial time at EISA is that the passion for home cinema extends across Europe. If you thought that our Mediterranean neighbours, for instance, were too busy enjoying the sunshine and lounging around on the beach to **spend a weekend cooped up indoors with a bag of M&Ms and the Lord of the Rings box set**, then think again.

It's also satisfying to learn that the same products that we love in the UK are kicking up a storm on the continent, such as Sony's award-winning HX853 Bravia flatscreen or Bowers and Wilkins' potent PVI-D subwoofer. In fact, the strength of UK brands in the audio side of things (including Cambridge Audio, KEF and the aforementioned B&W) shows the continuing sway that Blighty has in audiophile circles.

Yet being a part of EISA also highlights the differences that exist across Europe in technology terms – and not just the obvious ones either, such as Loewe being a far more widespread brand in

Germany than in the UK. For instance, during a chinwag with the editor of a Dutch home cinema magazine I discovered one example of how technology varies from country to country. There I was, extolling the virtues of Sony's Smart TV platform, only to be told that it's not so content-rich on the continent. Obviously, BBC iPlayer is a no-no in the Netherlands, but it seems other VOD services are absent, too.

A tangled web

This is an ongoing problem for the concept of Smart TV and internet-delivered content in particular. The distribution of film and TV material depends on licensing agreements, and this is a murky, but fascinating, part of the Hollywood machine. The way funding for movies is collected is frequently a story of different studios, in different territories, getting rights for different platforms. For instance, in his indispensable book *The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made*, author David Hughes describes how any production of *Spider-Man*, back in the 1990s, was mired by a co-funding deal that saw home video rights owned by Columbia TriStar, international TV rights by Paramount's parent company Viacom and theatrical distribution controlled by MGM. And then there are the situations where studios or production companies go bust, leaving distribution rights in limbo.

With these situations bubbling away in the background, it's no surprise that some movies take ages to arrive on Blu-ray, or even not at all – and the Smart technology ideal of being able to watch what we want, when we want and on what we want is bound to be equally affected. But, hey, at least we get BBC iPlayer ●

Have you embraced the video-on-demand generation? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Mark Craven is considering moving to the continent, and hopes he will be able to get by with the words 'Blu-ray', 'plasma' and 'popcorn'.





FILM FANATIC

Being paid to watch Blu-rays and DVDs is great, says **The Beek**. But it's not quite the bed of roses that some people might expect...

No matter what else I mention whenever anybody asks me what I do for a living, they always focus on one specific part. They couldn't care less that I write news stories, show reports, interviews, features or this very column. Nope. The only thing that ever gets their attention is the fact that I review BDs and DVDs.

It's at this point that I hear the phrase that has dogged me through my entire professional life: 'So, you get paid to watch movies'. At which point I always attempt to explain the intricacies of the job. How the analysis of picture and audio quality makes it something much more than merely watching movies. But all I ever get in return are blank looks and a repetition of their original exclamation, 'So, you get paid to watch movies'. And all that's left for me to do is nod my head and say, 'Yes, I do'.

Of course, it's not hard to see why people are entranced by the idea of being paid to watch films. After all, people love watching films. They do it all the time. Hell, they pay to do it. **So actually getting paid to do something that most other people regularly lay down piles of cash to do themselves is the very definition of a great job.** And for the most part it is. But as it happens, it can also be extremely stressful.

Feeling sad and Blu

Now I'm not saying that it's anything like the kind of work-related stress that affects soldiers, nurses, teachers or Charlie Sheen's pharmacist. But planning the disc reviews for each issue of *HCC* isn't the walk in the park that you might expect.

In an ideal world, I'd know exactly what's on the release schedule for any given month and would be able to call up a lovely PR person to order up review copies of all the titles we think will be of

interest. And for the most part I do know what's on the schedule and like to think I have a good idea of the sort of discs that will excite our readers. The difficulty comes in getting my hands on the discs themselves.

I'd love to be able to bring you reviews of the Blu-rays of Disney's *Avengers Assemble* or 20th Century Fox's *Prometheus* within the pages of this magazine before those titles go on sale. But sadly this just isn't going to happen.

The sad fact is that more and more studios are refusing to make Blu-ray copies available prior to them going on sale, with 20th Century Fox being the latest to join the club. The only solution the studios offer is to write a review based on having seen the film theatrically (for most mainstream press, this and a list of the extras is really all they need) or attend a PR screening.

While the latter might seem like a good idea, it's tricky finding a PR company with a multichannel home cinema system suitable for assessing the technical qualities of a Blu-ray release, or a film company that is happy to let one person hog its facilities to watch a movie in its entirety, anything up to three times (in 2D, in 3D and with a commentary), plus all of the extra features. And what happens when it comes to reviewing a TV series on Blu-ray? Would they let me move in for a few days in order to watch everything? I doubt it.

So what's the answer? Well, here at *HCC* we're going to carry on doing what we've always done. It may mean we're a bit late at times, but at least you can trust that our Blu-ray reviews are actually based on having watched the Blu-ray. It might not be something that the studios themselves care about, but hopefully you do.

Do you care about reviews appearing after Blu-rays go on sale? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Anton van Beek would like to point out that, should he be given free access to a movie studio's demo room for a whole day, he'll provide his own popcorn





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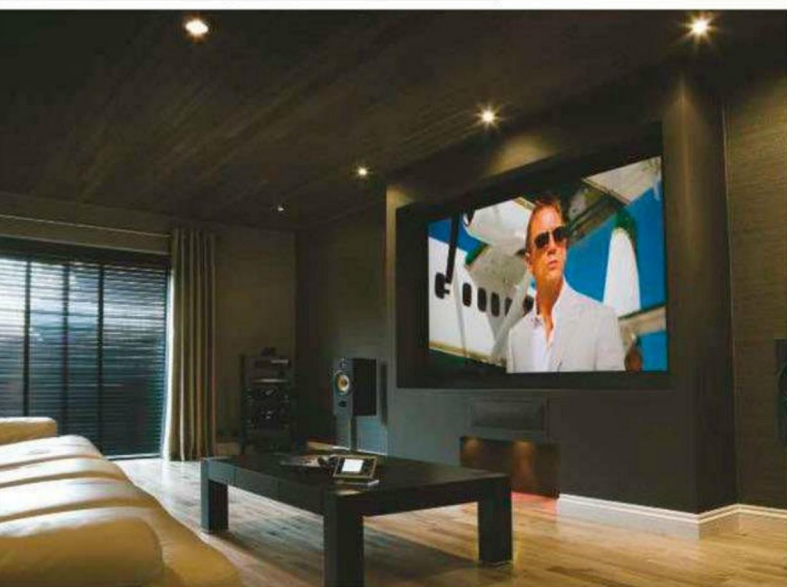
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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Want to comment on current technology? Need to share? **HCC** is here to help

I'll have to wait!

Thank you for taking the time to answer my query regarding upgrading my system by adding an Onkyo processor. I'm glad you did not think it was such a mad idea and was most surprised to see my email in print, let alone the Star Letter. The only problem now, having read your Bulletin page last issue, is that Onkyo are launching the new TX-NR5010 receiver in August. In view of this, I assume that a PR-SC5510 processor is likely to be released in the near future as well, so it looks like I will have to wait a few more weeks before I can raid the bank account!

David Amos, via email

Well, while there's been no official word from

Is a successor to Onkyo's PR-SC5509 on the way?



Onkyo about a PR-SC5510 processor, we wouldn't put it past them to launch such a product. If you're happy to wait a while, you might want to do just that.

A long rant

Richard Stevenson (*Point of View*, HCC 211) is worried for modern TV buyers. So he should be – it's all so complicated for the man in the street. Then

there are the staff in most large retailers who don't understand or are biased.

How can a straw poll around the HCC office be representative? No doubt your



Laughter is the best medicine

I had to laugh at your recent reviews – in particular your review of *Barbarella*. Mainly because I just don't get this obsession with all the mostly pointless extras on a disc. I mean, do you go to the cinema, then tell your mates that 'it wasn't that good... there was just the film'? How do you go on when you buy a music album? You must really hate digital downloads, where you don't even get a CD insert to read.

To actually say *Barbarella* was 'spoiled by a lack of extras' was really quite silly. Unless of course, you sat watching the movie, thinking, 'Damn, this is all I got for my money, no extras. This movie is ruined.' Either

that, or maybe you have some new tech, that flashes up 'Warning, this disc has no extras' across the screen while you're watching.

Or maybe it was none of them, and you're simply another one of the 'we should have lots of

things for free, and we'll complain if we don't get them' brigade. There seems to be a lot of that about these days. Ironic for a magazine that reviews items like the overpriced, bas-relief inspired (have you ever played *Uridium*?) Chord SPM-2400. I didn't see any extras on that, yet it still seemed to be worth (to some) a price of £7,000... It also remarkably got five stars for features, yet I failed to notice these five-star worthy features mentioned in the review. Perhaps they were hidden amidst the pretentious rambling. If so, they would have been filtered out by my in-built pretentiousness filter. I'm sure the people that pay hundreds of pounds for a power cable appreciate it,

though. Thanks for the amusing read...

Lee Cawley, via email

Thanks for the amusing letter. Just to clarify – it's not the movie that's spoiled by a lack of extras (that'd be odd) but the 'hi-def release'. Some will have expected Paramount to put a bit of effort into this key back catalogue title. As for Richard Stevenson, we'll try to keep the pretension out of his ramblings from now on.

Winner: Star Letter-writer Lee Cawley wins a copy of *The Hunger Games* on Blu-ray, courtesy of Lions Gate Home Entertainment. It's available to buy from Sep 3 on Blu-ray and DVD – and has lots of extras...





office is full of technically equipped staff with at least a passing interest in AV things.

3DTV not taking off? No surprises there, I agree. I have never seen any statement as to how someone who already wears glasses is supposed to wear Active Shutter lenses, too? Can anyone enlighten me – actually don't worry about it. I'm more interested in how it is broadcast than watching it.

There is outcry at the moment that the 4G auction will cause interference to the almost completed DVB-T roll out. Quite right too. It's again a minority who will need mobile TV services 'because they can'.

Why should everyone hook up their smart TV to the internet? If you are in the market for a top-end TV (because you want better video and, if possible, better sound) then you will get Smart features and 3D whether you want them or not. Doesn't mean you have to use them! I checked the BT rollout of Infinity 2 recently and there are no plans in my area for FTTC (Fiber To The Cabinet). So I am stuck with 3.4MB/s (and paying for 20) forever, it seems. Why on earth would I want to stream TV down that!

Lastly, am I happy with a traditional remote control (*Digital Copy*, HCC 211)? Too right! I pride myself in knowing what every button on every remote in the lounge is for (must be seven of them). Mind you, most are Sony or Humax, so are similar and intuitive. Would I want a touch screen/tablet? Not on your nelly.

Got all that off my chest!
Ian King, via email

Thanks for sharing your views, Ian. And, even though you told us not to bother – you can simply wear Active Shutter 3D

glasses (or Passive ones, for that matter) over the top of your normal specs.

Right to reply

In response to Steve Russell's response to my response (stay with me) in HCC 209, I was rather surprised to read that he has taken such offense at my musings on his opinion that most home cinema kit should be hidden away.

I merely stated that I look at in-wall speakers and feel they meow rather than roar, I never inferred any authority on in-wall speakers at all... I don't have in-wall speakers. I have big, roar-y floorstanders with a very substantial centre speaker – all kit lovingly designed and crafted by the same Bowers and Wilkins engineers Steve clearly purchased his system from.

Admittedly I don't go into a cinema to see the speakers – but I would love to go behind the scenes! And that's my point – to me, it's not just about the quality of the image or sound that I'm getting, it's about the machines that produce all this wonderful stuff themselves, and as a home cinema enthusiast I can watch a film and appreciate the boxes and engineering that are making the audio-visual magic appear.

Steve, however, researches his gear meticulously, spends his hard-earned cash on it, and then shoves it in a boot room – I'm happy enough with mine on display.

Again, please read my letter in HCC 207, but carefully this time. Steve shouldn't presume that because I made a quip about Anthem gear that I inferred that he was tremendously rich. I simply made a quip about the wealth of people who possess Anthem gear. He is clearly dedicated and

Universal BD players: Providing the best of both worlds

passionate about his home cinema, he has been for 40 years (I'd love to see what constituted his home cinema in 1972!). Perhaps he would like to invite me round so I can drink his wine and see and hear his system for myself... and then have a peek in his boot room.
Giles Manton, via email

And with that, we're officially ending 'Steve and Giles argue slowly via the medium of a monthly magazine'. Look out for it on Blu-ray later this year.

I want that disc!

I enjoyed your article on SACD in HCC 211 and am anxious to acquire Universal's release of Argenta's *Espana* on SHM-SACD, which is mentioned. I understand this was released in April of this year. However, I cannot locate a dealer in the UK from which I can purchase this issue (not even Amazon!). Are you able to help, please?
K Milton, via email

That particular disc, as mentioned as his personal favourite by Sony's Technical marketing manager, Eric Kingdon, is a Japanese release – Eric will have picked up a copy on one of his frequent trips to Sony HQ.

Unfortunately, it isn't currently available from any UK retailers, so you're best bet is to have a look on eBay or specialist Japanese exporters like JPopHelp (www.jpophelp.com). And you should expect to pay quite a lot of money, too! Sorry if that's a rather frustrating answer...

Universally speaking

Hi, thanks for a great mag – I have been reading for approx

10 years. A couple of months ago I bought a Denon DBP-1611 for under £200, refurbished, but with full guarantee, so I'm dead chuffed. Before the purchase I searched for the review in HCC 194 by Adrian Justins. Was he cut short or something, as there was no mention of how the machine played SACDs or DVD-Audio discs. When people such as myself buy these machines we want to know how they sound as well as how they play Blu-rays and DVDs as these items are not exactly cheap. The review of the DBP-2012 was excellent, shame about the DBP-1611. While I am at it when will we get a review of more universal machines as there are quite a few out there at present.
Glenn Johnson, via email

The DBP-1611 wasn't allocated much space in the mag, as it wasn't the most exciting of Denon's players at that time – hence the review not going into detail about its SACD and DVD-A playback. Sorry about that, but we're glad you're enjoying the product.

Regarding the universal players that are out there, we have covered most of them – certainly those from Oppo, Cambridge Audio, Primare and Onkyo. New decks have been announced from Marantz and Denon, of course, but we're yet to receive review samples. Perhaps a roundup of universal decks from an audiophile perspective might be in order ●

Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Hadlow House, 9 High Street, Green Street Green, Orpington BR6 6BG or email us at letters@homecinemachoice.com. Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive.



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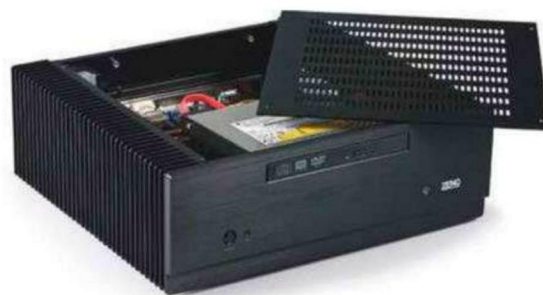
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REVIEWS

→ **Hardware highlights** SONY Flagship STR-DA5700ES 7.2-channel AV receiver
 BOWERS & WILKINS MT-60D sub/sat package HUMAX DTR-T1000 YouView PVR PANASONIC
 65in VT50 series plasma TV ONKYO TX-NR515 AVR ELIPSON Planet M 5.1 speaker system
 SAMSUNG 40in mid-range LED TV GROUPTEST Five Airplay speakers go head-to-head **AND MORE!**

Lean machine



Does Sony's 46in HX753 TV offer the performance to match its laid-back looks? Turn to p86 to find out...

HCC Ratings key	
Outstanding	1 2 3 4 5
Above average	1 2 3 4 5
Acceptable	1 2 3 4 5
Disappointing	1 2 3 4 5
Dire	1 2 3 4 5

AV evolutionary

Sony lays claim to the upper end of the AV receiver market with this imaginatively specified flagship. **Steve May** is blown away

The STR-DA5700ES is an important product for Sony's home entertainment division. Not only does it represent a concerted effort to retake ground lost at the upper end of the AV market, it comes with refinements that we've not seen before, and some bold new ideas. This is Sony reinventing home theatre for the network era.

The unit itself inherits familiar ES family genes. It has that characteristic fascia ledge used to balance way too many buttons, and sports no fewer than four knobs and two disguised input wells. Hidden behind one are phono AV inputs, USB and a calibration mic input, while in the other resides an HDMI input. Minimal it is not.

But the receiver's fresh thinking is immediately obvious on the back panel. This is the first AVR to offer a 10/100 Ethernet switch – a bank of four ports makes it wonderfully simple to extend your LAN to neighbouring networked devices. This means that in addition to getting the AVR online, you can connect a Smart TV, Blu-ray and games console via the STR-DA5700ES. This is highly convenient. I usually run a 4- or 8-port switch in rooms with connected hardware, and this saves the bother. Those with high-speed Gigabit networks may be disappointed that this is a 10/100 switch, but for most this won't be an issue.

The switch is offered in lieu of Wi-Fi, which is built into the cheaper STR-DN1030. High-end audio sensitivities preclude adding wireless here – but in my book a switch is infinitely preferable. Of course, you'll need to ensure it remains active when the AVR is shutdown, by toggling the appropriate menu setting, or all your connected kit will lose 'net access.

Also new on this model is a 96kHz/24-bit two-channel PC USB



The STR-DA5700ES' front panel is strewn with sockets, buttons and knobs

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
7.2 channel AVR,
built around
the Sony
Entertainment
Network portal

POSITION:
Top-of-the-line
ES-grade
receiver

PEERS:
Pioneer
SC-LX85;
Yamaha
RX-A3010

input for those who favour laptops and PCs as a sound source. More conventionally, there are five HDMI inputs, plus two outputs – ideal if you want to drive both a screen and a projector. A button to switch between them sits on the remote. You can route to either individually, or send signals to both simultaneously.

Other sockets include a quartet of optical digital audio inputs (compatible with 32, 44.1, 48, 88.2 and 92kHz), plus one output, and three coaxial ins (compatible with 192kHz). All video sources can be

upscaled and output via HDMI at 1080p (but you can't down-route from HDMI to component). Two subwoofer feeds are provided.

The STR-DA5700ES also sports an RS232C port for service and control, an IR remote in/out and two 12V triggers. It comes with two remotes – a routine zapper and a simplified alternative.

Is this really an AVR?

Using the STR-DA5700ES feels quite unlike any Sony AVR before it. Indeed, you quickly forget you're using an AV

receiver at all. Sony has designed a user interface which breaks ground in ways that its rivals haven't yet achieved, yet always seems logical and intuitive to use.

Highly graphical, the new UI navigates via vertical tabs, labelled Watch, Listen, Favourites, Easy Automation, Sound Effects and Settings. Click Watch and you're taken to your video sources, select Listen and you're shown audio. All are depicted with hi-res icons. These divisions seamlessly integrate local connected hardware, network >



78 REVIEWS

content and online services. It takes no time at all to acclimatise and I soon forgot I was rummaging around a hunk of hi-fi. It's more akin to driving a Smart TV.

This is emphasised by the fact that the AVR assimilates nearly all the key Sony Entertainment Network streaming video services. YouTube, DailyMotion, LOVEFILM and a host of other channels are all on tap – although the BBC iPlayer is conspicuous by its absence.

The receiver's graphical polish is also put to good use during the setup process, where Sony's latest auto-calibration system, DCAC, makes short work of measuring and optimising a listening room. It took only a few chirps to measure the distance of all my speakers and apply its proprietary room-optimising algorithms. The end result is a lithe, musical receiver with taut, deep bass.

As befits a next-gen entertainment hub, Sony's STR-DA5700ES can render video and audio content across a LAN and from local USB – most AV receivers embrace audio but draw the line at video content. Bizarrely, its file support is better than that available on the brand's Bravia TVs. The AVR identified all my NAS devices (yes, I have more than one) and PCs, and I was soon watching MKV-wrapped TV played across the network. The unit was equally at home with MOV, MP4 and (some) AVI files.

It also does a surprisingly good job of enhancing the quality of compressed audio from these files, thanks to its post-processing modes.

Audio support is equally broad: WAV, FLAC, AAC, MP3 and WMA all play across a network. This promiscuity is mirrored by the AVR's USB media reader. However, the STR-DA5700ES can't see or display album art from either local or network sources – a shame given how visual the rest of the GUI is.

Movie rocker

Sonically, the STR-DA5700ES is a knockout. For the most part, the receiver was used in A.F.D Auto mode (Auto Format Direct), which doesn't impart any processing to content – and the result was exquisite imaging with multichannel content, not only across the front soundstage, but to the side and rear.

Somewhat uniquely at this price point, Sony's AVR is only a seven-

Remotes: Sony offers a simplified handset for everyday use



Connections

A Happy to be a hub

By incorporating a four-port 10/100 Ethernet switch, the STR-DA5700ES acts as a true network hub for your 'net-connected gear

B Legacy hookups

As you'd expect from a flagship receiver, Sony's model totes a bank of phono AV inputs, including one optimistically labelled 'BD/DVD'

C One-cable connection

Use this ARC-capable HDMI output for a fuss-free way to beef up the sonics from your flatscreen TV

D More power needed

Although only a seven-channel design, you can feed an additional amp via these pre-outs if you have a nine-channel speaker array

channel design – it can be configured as 5.1 with two front height channels or, more classically, two rear backs. It is possible to run a 9.2 configuration by connecting the Pre Out Surround Back or Pre Out Front Height jacks to an external power amp.

I auditioned with four speakers to the rear. Height processing comes in the form of Dolby Pro-Logic IIz and DTS Neo:X, but my room just doesn't have the ceiling height for either to be effective. Anyone thinking of building a cinema room these days should certainly factor extra headroom into the equation. This is an idea that's not going to go away.

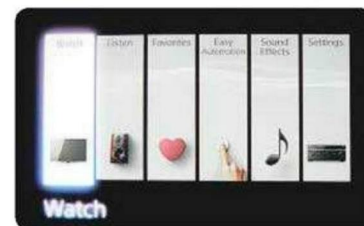
Transient delivery is sensational. *Battle Without Honor or Humanity* (Blu-ray) is a classic test of dynamics and this Sony wasn't found wanting. The *Kill Bill* theme was delivered with whip-crack attack; sledgehammer riffs kept tight for maximum damage.

Onboard power is rated at 120W per channel. This translates to plenty of gas in the tank, and at no point did the AVR feel as though it was running on empty. Of course, not many of us have the luxury of unleashing an AVR at full volume – it can be pretty antisocial, not to mention structurally dangerous. This is where a piece of Sony wizardry – sound optimisation – comes into its own. Essentially, it maintains the weight and dynamics of a soundtrack when it's played at lower than reference volumes. I've previously seen a sound optimiser on the brand's cheaper STR-DNI030 AV receiver, but was left unimpressed. The implementation here sounds completely different, and it works astonishingly well. Shave 10dB off your playback volume and (after a brief period of psycho-acoustical adjustment) it rebalances the entire soundstage. For late night, or social listening, it's a must-have.

Indeed, there are many excellent post-processing modes onboard this



→ Analysis



GUI: Make no mistake, this is the best-looking AV receiver user interface yet. Fun, simple to use and absolutely gorgeous

Killer feature: Thanks to its 10/100 Ethernet switch and VOD services, the STR-DA5700ES is finally a networked receiver worthy of the name

→ Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES

DTS-HD Master Audio: YES

THX: NO

Multichannel audio: YES 7 x 120W (into 8 Ohms)

Multichannel input: YES

Multiroom: YES Second zone (stereo audio, component video)

AV inputs: 7 x digital audio inputs (4 x optical and 3 x coaxial); 5 x phono AV inputs; USB; 4-port 10/100 Ethernet switch; FM aerial input

HDMI: 6 x inputs; 2 x outputs, v1.4a (supports 3D video and Audio Return Channel)

Video upscaling: YES to 1080p

Component: YES 2-in, 2-out

Dimensions: 430(w) x 187.5(h) x 420(d)mm

Weight: 17.3kg

Also featuring: Sony Entertainment Network; DCAC (Digital Cinema Auto Calibration); LAN and USB multimedia file playback; secondary 'simple' remote controller; HD D.C.S post-processing; Dolby Pro-Logic IIz; DTS Neo:X; sound optimiser; twin subwoofer outputs; Surround Back and Front Height pre-outs



Taking audio to new heights

Sony says it's ready for the next stage in home cinema sound



Sony's new Home Entertainment HQ in Tokyo hasn't been open long for business – when we breezed in, its audio and AV wing still had the decorators in. Yet despite the factory-fresh vibe, some things seem strangely familiar. The new listening room of Sony's Chief Distinguished Engineer Takashi Kanai appears a carbon copy of his old one, down to the bric-a-brac and goofy toys. It takes a while to spot that the height of the dimly-lit den has actually been extended to accommodate extra front channels. Ceiling surround, it seems, is an area of interest to Sony.

The feature has been around for a while now, but has attracted little attention, primarily because there's no software. But that could change following Dolby's introduction of Dolby Atmos, the cinema format which adds height to the sound-mixing lexicon.

To demonstrate the possibilities, Kanai and his team have worked up some demo software with their counterparts at Sony Pictures, specifically an experimental DTS height mix from the Angelina Jolie actioner *Salt*. The receiver used for the demo is the STR-DA5700ES. The sequence culminates with a massive explosion that sees the titular star falling through the floor of a government building. The resulting sonic collapse is dramatic, almost as though the ceiling is falling into the listening space.

This isn't DSP, but additional channels of audio crafted by the film's sound engineers. 'We must convince studios to adopt a height variation for DTS-HD MA and Dolby TrueHD soundtracks,' says Kanai with excitement. It's difficult not to disagree. 'When it comes, this receiver will be ready.'

receiver, most notably HD D.C.S (Digital Cinema Sound). Based on studio-measured soundstage data, it aims to recreate the ambience of real-world theatres, and is available in three flavours: Dynamic, Theatre and Studio. The former is designed to create the impression of a large cinema, while Theatre brings in the ambience of a dubbing stage. Studio reduces local reflections and lifts dialogue. All are interesting, but I found myself favouring Theatre time and again. *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, played from a Sky+HD box in 5.1, gained scale and weight with HD D.C.S. engaged. The receiver played the movie as if it was a heavy metal concert – once you start to pick out the electric guitar licks lurking within the soundmix, the STR-DA5700ES will have you involuntarily air-guitaring whenever the Autobots kick ass.

Sky's transmission also transpires to be a good test of the amp's seven-channel DSP modes. Although the satcaster's broadcast is limited to 5.1, the movie was mixed in 7.1 and all the cues seem eager to be pulled out. The result is the sonic equivalent of upscaling.

Of course, the STR-DA5700ES really comes alive with Blu-ray and lossless audio. Running through Korean actioner *War of the Arrows* (Blu-ray), with its enveloping DTS-HD MA mix, reveals just how subtle its staging can be. While this amp relishes the opportunity to rip the air between each speaker apart, it's also at home with more atmospheric fare.

Other key soundfield treats prove to be the Berlin Philharmonic Hall and two True Concert Mapping modes. This is distinctly sophisticated sound processing.

Conclusion

Brands have been striving to reinvent the AVR for some time, with limited success. AirPlay and Spotify have been routinely tasked with handling the image makeover. But with the STR-DA5700ES Sony has refreshed the sector without recourse to either. Not only does this receiver sound fabulous, it embraces online content with more conviction than any AVR before it. The user interface is slick, the feature spread adventurous (and relevant), and most importantly, it sounds extraordinary. In the arena of high-end home cinema, this has just become the gladiator to beat. Unless you really need nine channels of amplification, of course... ●



HCC VERDICT

STR-DA5700ES → £2,000 Approx

→ Supplier: www.sony.co.uk

→ Tel: 08705 111 999

Highs: Integrated 4-port network switch; lean, muscular character; IPTV services; broad file support; superior post-processing DSP modes

Lows: Fussy design; runs hot; seven-channel only

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Revamped rockers

B&W has updated its 'Pressure Vessel' subwoofer and heavily re-engineered its M-1 speakers. For **Adam Rayner**, this is tremendously good news

I was fortunate enough to audition Bowers & Wilkins' first PV1 subwoofer and M-1 Mini Theatre speakers. At the time, my lad was just a boy (now he is man-sized) and even he said, 'Dad, they're just clearer than the others,' as they wiped the floor with their assembled rivals.

The PV1 was the brainchild of one of the brand's engineers, out for a walk in the South Coast town where

B&W is based. He spotted a one-metre aluminium sphere bobbing in the sea – a marine buoy. He thought the material and the shape would make a theoretically perfect enclosure for a subwoofer. Now, I would swim in the English Channel naked on Christmas Day to have been privy to the original one-metre prototypes, but the PV1 was still bonkers by the time it ended up as

the football-sized cult seller of low-frequency grip and performance that we all know and love.

Likewise, I was as impressed as my boy with the M-1 – and would say so when asked by relatives and friends as to what's the best of the smallest speakers around.

And now, they have been re-engineered. I hate it when companies over-egg what they have



done; when this year's model is mostly a cosmetic tweak or else a quick fettle of the internal crossovers. This new speaker isn't that at all. It's a total step change. Little to see, lots to hear.

Time to fiddle

The new M-1 does look pretty much the same, though. I grumbled at the fiddly speaker connection, but that's something only reviewers care about. Owners will lovingly install them once – not twelve times a year or more. But the thing is, it was a faff. The concept of hiding the connection within the stem of the integral bracket is still brilliant, though, and what you now find under the easy on-off base piece is a pair of spring-loaded squeeze connectors for a decently fat bare wire.

Each M-1 arrives with a stumpy wall bracket as well as the bigger foot, and with the included wrench key you can loosen the back and

replace it at 90 degrees to use the speaker sideways as a centre. B&W also sells an optional stand for 'tower'-style use.

The drivers are special. Hiding under the grille is an aluminium high-frequency dome that is rear-loaded with a tube, like the brand's Nautilus speaker, and the woven glass fibre midbass driver now sports an anti-resonance plug, borrowed from B&W's PM1 speaker. That, and a lower crossover point for the tweeter, make for a speaker that may look the same but has more grunt, impact and audio audacity.

The evolution of the original PV1 sub to the PVID is even more involved. It has a bigger enclosure and hi-tech new drivers. You might describe it as dual-headed Hydra of metallic bass. I certainly do.

The front provides a panel that requires a gentle stroke for the OLED display inside to burst into life. From here you can delve into the sub's EQ

settings and presets, or else download Bowers & Wilkins' SubApp and do it on a laptop on the sofa (a long wire is provided). This simply duplicates all you can do through the panel. Setup, derived from the B&W DB1's platform, might at first seem difficult but is actually a doddle.

First impressions

To give a speaker system a full review, you have to play a few different sources and watch a number of flicks all the way through to have a solid clear idea about their ultimate performance. Likewise, to live with them and feel how they improve a little as they run in is fascinating. But at the same time, the immediate basic performance that a system hits you with is equally important. In truth, you will be forming nearly all of your opinions in the first ten seconds. First impressions count – and the B&W array impressed from the word 'go'. ➤

Style icon: B&W's MT-60D system offers a premium design and finish

AV/CV

PRODUCT: High-end 5.1 sub/sat system

POSITION: B&W has an offering in most brackets. This is their top-of-the-line system in dinky boxes

PEERS: Tannoy Arena Highline 300; Monitor Audio Apex





Depth charge:

Bowers & Wilkins claims the PVID sub can reach as low as 7.5Hz

What happened when I first fired these up, with a bit of Peter Gabriel musical mayhem from a demo disc, was wonderful. My mind was momentarily boggled. For not only do these small, smart-looking enclosures pack amazing, sweet-sounding tweeters, the new fibreglass midbass drivers reach down to 64Hz, and said tweeters are also crossed-over lower down, too. What this means is that the midband – right where Peter sings and rasps – is amazingly clear and the lower midbass snap is similarly effective. And, with the rich and tight output of the PVID subwoofer seemingly nailed to each small satellite, you'll feel you're surrounded by big cabinets with ultra-fast drivers.

'Want small, gorgeous and astonishingly good? These are the speakers of choice for your cinema'

Film-wise, *The Hangover* and *The Hangover Part 2* were my BD fodder of choice and the B&W system's handling was superb. A major slice of these movies' sound design is dropping big bass-heavy music into the action with room-shaking boom, way above the dialogue level. This is a challenge for such small speakers as you are asking for low-end impact, scale and, above all, vast dynamics – yet somehow the MT-60D set delivers.

In the sequel, which is far darker than the original, there is a shooting of horrible realism; the gunshot tears the laughter right out of your throat, such is the impact. The downward reach of the fibre cones is breathtaking, and the subwoofer

is so tight, deep and implacable, that it, too, seems to be bigger than its enclosure make feasible.

Small details aren't ignored either. In the first movie, a very real and growly tiger ends up in the bathroom of the protagonists' suite. Its roar is high in the mix, yet when Zach Galifianakis' dimwitted character blunders in to relieve himself, you can clearly hear him stop, mid-flow, as he turns around in horror. The resolution is exquisite – these satellites lap up subtle effects with relish.

Domestic bliss

The MT-60D system is designed to fit into homes, rather than homes fitting around it – as you would a pair of B&W's Nautilus flagships, or a THX Ultra2 system such as Jamo's recent D 600. They are pretty and unobtrusive, more self-effacing than bling (although the subwoofer does have a slice of pure desirability about that'll surely make it as huge a seller as its forebear).

But beyond the looks and pursuit of domestic harmony, the MT-60D is also about sheer performance. Yes, you are paying more than you would for most sub/sat arrays (if the subwoofer in particular seems steep, a more affordable B&W package utilises the ASW608) but this setup is the business. It's startlingly potent for the size, with blistering dynamics and a purity and soundstage that equals and surpasses a lot of its more expensive rivals.

It is therefore heartily recommended. The Q Acoustics 2000i bundle I reviewed last month is great for the budget-conscious, but if you want small, gorgeous and astonishingly good, then these are the speakers of choice for your cinema room ■

→ Specifications

MT-1 satellite speaker

Drive units: 1 x 1in aluminium dome tweeter with Nautilus tube-loading; 1 x 4in woven glass fibre cone midbass driver with anti-resonance plug

Enclosure: Two-way rear-vented enclosure with gas-flowed internal curved porting

Frequency response: 64Hz-23kHz +/- 3dB

Sensitivity: 85dB @ 1W/1m

Power handling: 20-100W

Dimensions: 114(w) x 248(h) x 162(d)mm

Weight: 2.3kg

PVID subwoofer

Drive units: 2 x 8in paper-Kevlar-aluminium long-throw drivers in balanced drive configuration

Enclosure: Sealed, truncated sphere

Frequency response: 7.5Hz-450Hz

On board power: 400W Class D

Remote control: No but there is a USB hook-up to use a laptop for remote setup – a USB-to-3.5mm cable is included

Dimensions: 270(w) x 342(h) x 358(d)mm

Weight: 18.7kg

Connections: 2 x phono inputs for either stereo or LFE use; Molex connector for high-level speaker connection; 3 x 3.5mm inputs – two triggers (on/standby & to toggle between two presets) and one for the supplied USB to 3.5mm cord; 1 x mini USB socket for firmware updates



HCC VERDICT

Bowers & Wilkins MT-60D → £2,000
Approx → Supplier: www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk → Tel: 01903 221 500

Highs: High performance for small speakers; delicious scale and impact; lavish looks

Lows: Premium price tag; connections are a bit fiddly

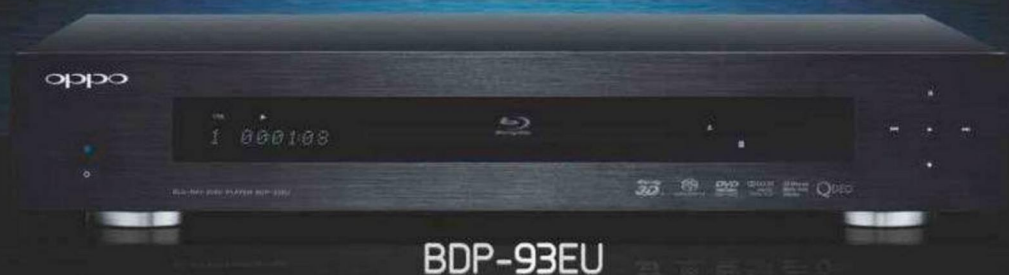
Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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King of catch-up

Heralded as a TV system for the nation by co-developer Lord Alan Sugar, the first YouView PVR is here. Should you hire it or fire it? **Steve May** reports

YouView, the perennially gestating terrestrial digital/IPTV TV service, has finally arrived... in the guise of a rather anonymous-looking digital recorder from Humax. Developed by the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Five, TalkTalk, BT and Arqiva, to the tune of £70m, the service was originally expected to launch in 2010. But at times it looked like it might never appear.

YouView is best thought of as Freeview on steroids. It's the first non-subscription TV service to combine over-the-air DVB with internet-delivered catch-up and on-demand services (courtesy of BBC iPlayer, ITVPlayer, 4oD and Demand 5). It's a genuine alternative to the likes of Virgin Media's TiVo and

Sky+HD, and its makers hope those who have resisted the siren call of subscription TV packages, or simply fancy a change, will see it as a tempting proposition. Both BT and TalkTalk will also be pushing the platform, with branded YouView boxes forming part of their own triple-play packages.

Of course, two years on the back-burner haven't done the service too many favours. Many of YouView's integrated online offerings are already available on Smart TVs and other connected devices.

What's more, the service will soon have to face off against a new generation of Freeview boxes, which promise to offer much of the same functionality. Dubbed Freeview

Smart, these will embrace many of the advances outlined in the latest D-book 7 specification, including a retrospective EPG, integrated catch-up and IPTV-only channels (sound familiar?). Unless there's a coming together (which, of course, would be the sensible solution), both operations would seem to be shaping up for a classic format-clash.

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
First-generation
YouView TV/
IPTV PVR

POSITION:
The first in what
is promised to
be a range of
products

PEERS:
Virgin Media
TiVo;
Sky+ HD

Boxing clever

Humax knows how to make a good PVR, so it's perhaps no surprise that this £300 box is so slick. Featuring a 500GB hard drive and twin Freeview HD tuners, it's clearly a close relation of the brand's HDR-Fox T2. The finish is gloss black, with a large illuminated power button at the centre.

The first YouView offering comes in an unassuming 500GB PVR



→ Analysis



GUI: Navigating the various content options within the YouView environment is straightforward, thanks to a low-slung menu overlay – use the retrospective EPG to catch up on missed programmes

Killer feature: Humax's PVR brings some (but not all) of the cutting-edge features of TiVo – but without the subscription cost

→ Specifications

HDD: YES 500GB
Tuner: YES twin Freeview HD
Connections: 1 x HDMI; Scart; phono audio; optical digital output; USB; Ethernet
Sound: 3 x 10W
Dimensions: 380(w) x 55(h) x 246(d)mm
Weight: 2.7kg
Features: Retrospective EPG; integrated on-demand and catch-up services; Series Link; HD prompts

Connectivity includes HDMI, aerial loopthrough, Scart, AV phonos and an optical digital audio output. There's also a USB port and Ethernet. Curiously, Wi-Fi is AWOL. If users are unable to easily hardwire the box to their broadband router, Humax does sell a USB Wi-Fi dongle to do the job.

But it's not the hardware which sets this YouView box apart, it's the user experience. An inspired blend of iPlayer and TiVo, it presents what could potentially be a confusing offering and makes it a breeze to use.

Beaneath the lid, clever things are afoot but you never feel bogged down in menus. The main screen is a subtle live content overlay, with a navigation bar across the bottom of the screen. From here you can scoot to the TV guide, on-demand content (which at the moment is just the four channel catch-up players, but other services including Sky Now will come) and your recordings library.

The retrospective EPG is key to YouView's appeal. Users can both plan ahead and record to the HDD, or look back for what they've missed. When a past show is selected from the guide, it starts the relevant channel's catch-up player. There's also powerful, but flawed, Search functionality. Type in a subject and related suggestions are offered. You

can filter content via genre and type, or peruse a Most Popular selection. Unfortunately, searching is restricted to catch-up content only; the live TV EPG is ignored.

Image quality is outstanding. Recordings mirror their original transmission quality, with the best offering plenty of fine detail and texture. Standard-def content is obviously soft in comparison, but the box does a fine job upscaling.

Streamed content is far more variable, and to a large part is dependent on the speed of your broadband. YouView itself appears to be optimised for 3Mbps to prevent stuttering. To mitigate any buffering problems a small partition on the hard drive is reserved to cache streams. During my audition I experienced no buffering problems.

Overall, I'd rate this YouView debutant a winner, although it's not without issues. The box makes a (low-level) noise, even in Standby, and Wi-Fi really should be integrated. The latter issue will be addressed shortly, as will the average-sized hard drive – a 1TB version will follow later this year.

As a user experience, though, it's pretty darn good, beating the current crop of wall-garden Smart TVs at their own game. Buy with confidence ●

Remote:

Comfortable in the hand and very intuitive



HCC VERDICT

Humax DTR-T1000 → £300 Approx
 → Supplier: www.humaxdigital.co.uk
 → Tel: 0844 669 8800

Highs: Seamless integration of internet telly and DVB; excellent image quality

Lows: A tad noisy, even in standby; no DLNA functionality; no USB media reader; restricted Search

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Introducing the affordable elite

Don't underestimate Sony's HX7 TVs, says **Steve May**.
When it comes to price and performance, they're hard to beat

All things considered, the KDL-46HX753 may be the best-value television in Sony's entire 2012 TV range. Neither a feature-stripped shadow of its highly-rated HX8 range-toppers, nor a price-compromised picture performer, the HX7 is a comfortably appointed flatscreen that's astonishing value for money. That is not to say it's perfect, but it gets way more right than it gets wrong.

Design-wise, the set manages to be more than just generic. While the brand's step-up TVs adopt a minimalist pose and ship with a stylish slab pedestal which doubles as a sound system, the KDL-46HX753 rides on a larger version of the chromed easel stand first seen on last year's half-pint EX models.

The frame is high-gloss black with metal trim. It looks svelte, despite the fact that the somewhat chunky bezel contravenes recently announced judicial guidelines on coolness.

Connectivity includes four HDMI's (two to the side), a CAM slot and dual USBs (one for general media playback, the other for a Skype webcam or external PVRing hard drive). In addition to an Ethernet connection, the screen has integrated Wi-Fi and Wi-Fi Direct. The latter allows more intimate communication between the TV and local devices, so you don't have to worry your WLAN. Typically it's used to 'Catch and

throw' content from a mobile device to the screen – I paired the set to a Sony S tablet, and digital stills, music and videos could all be chucked to the TV using DLNA, with a short pause before they display. This proves a handy way to share content.

The TV comes with a generic Sony zapper (no touchscreen strangeness here). Should you need them, there are on-body controls for volume, channel selection and AV inputs tucked away on the rear.

Updated GUI

Driving this set is a doddle. The KDL-46HX753 employs the brand's now familiar, updated Xrossmedia bar interface. When selected via the remote's Home button, the main TV display minimises to allow for vertical and horizontal navigation. From here you can quickly explore standard TV settings or call up widgets and apps. The EPG is standard Freeview fare, albeit one supported by a live TV window. Sony has been promising a meta-rich enhanced alternative, but at the time of writing this has yet to arrive. Sigh.

The Sony Entertainment Network portal is accessed via a dedicated SEN button on the remote. Revamped for 2012, apps, movies and music are now grouped into easily navigable clusters. As we've grown to expect from the brand, the IPTV choice here is wide and varied, with Sony's own Video Unlimited streaming service bringing pay-per-view films to the party.

For all the easy navigating and internet-connected Smarts, Sony continues to deny its TV fleet MKV file support. Present the screen hi-def footage in a MKV-wrapped file, either from USB or across the

network, and it'll be declared unplayable. Consequently, you'll almost certainly need to invest in a separate media streamer to watch all your disparate file formats. The TV can, however, unspool AVIs, MOVs, MP4 and XviD across a home network and from USB. Audio compatibility extends to MP3, WMA, WMV and AAC.

Sibling rivalry

There are some key differences worth noting between this HX7 and Sony's step-up HX8 models when it comes to panel and picture processing. The cheaper screen lacks the full complement of imaging technologies which huddle under the aegis of X-Reality Pro (in short, the HX7 drops the Pro suffix), and foregoes clever local dimming in favour of frame dimming, which contents itself with adjusting backlight levels depending on screen content. The HX8 models also employ an OptiContrast panel. But to read into these differences some sort of failing would be to miss the point. Pit this 200Hz panel against comparably priced competitors and it'll almost certainly emerge victorious.

The KDL-46HX753 offers the usual array of presets, but the real key to getting the best from this model is keeping a lid on edge enhancement and managing motion blur. When you first get it out of the box, rush to the sharpness setting and dial it down to Minimum – and then resist touching it again, as to do so simply invites ringing and certainly doesn't add any detail to the picture. There's a variety of Motionflow XR 400Hz modes to choose from, but only a couple should be entertained: Standard and Clear. The former



AV/CV

PRODUCT: 3D Active Shutter Smart LED LCD TV

POSITION: Upper mid-range – Sony's HX853 models sit above it

PEERS: LG 47LM670T; Samsung UE46ES6800

The KDL-46HX753 is supplied with a stylish lean-back chrome stand



BIG GUN!

The animated sequel *Starship Troopers: Invasion* touches down on BD, p123





keeps motion clarity close to 1000 lines and only incurs a low level of ringing artefacts, while the latter edges motion resolution up to 1080 lines, with no intrusive artefacts. They have a slightly different look, but either is fine for sports and general viewing. For movies, Motionflow is probably best switched off entirely. There's a hit to be taken when it comes to motion detail, but the result is a more pleasing cinematic experience.

That said, the battle-torn terrain and action scenes in Korean war epic *The Front Line* (Cine Asia, Blu-ray) are rendered with such exquisite detail when viewed with the Clear setting engaged, you might well choose to ignore this advice. The picture is nothing short of mesmerising.

Stay well clear of the Smooth setting though, which shrouds moving objects in a translucent smudge, and avoid both the Clear Plus and Impulse modes which dim and flicker images respectively.

Smooth mover

The set is capable of profound dynamics and has a decent black level. However, it's not the depth of its blacks which should be praised, but its smoothness. Often a panel will go Gotham dark but suffer from crawling luminance noise. That's not the case here. This set enjoys velvety smoothness. Backlight uniformity is generally fine – there's some edge glow creeping in from the corners, but it's largely kept under control.

The screen's 3D performance can be rated above average. You'll need

Dark star: Sony's step-down HX-753 offers smooth, absorbing blacks

Remote: Nothing too radical from Sony in the handset stakes



to invest in some optional Active Shutter glasses, but the reward is bright 3D which manages to keep a lid on unwanted double-imaging effects without comprising colour fidelity. Stereography isn't totally clean – those dratted Chinese lanterns in *Tangled* (Disney, Blu-ray) continue to torment – but crosstalk proves only a minor irritation. The KDL-46HX753 also allows you to dimensionalise broadcast 2D content. Turning *Cash in the Attic* into 3D is every bit as exciting as you might imagine.

One obvious weakness of this TV is its sonic performance. There's a honky dullness to its presentation, which is a bit like watching TV with a perennial head cold, and the downward-firing speakers (powered by 20W of amplification) fail to offer any appreciable stereo spread. Consequently, this is one model you will want to partner with a dedicated sound system – or possibly Sony's new HT-CT260 soundbar.

Highly competitive

The KDL-46HX753 may have the onerous luck of being the baby brother to Sony's over-performing HX8 models, but its highly competitive price and admirable performance make this connected LED TV a terrific temptation in its own right. The screen scores highly when it comes to HD, thanks to smooth deep blacks and summery hues, and doesn't embarrass itself with 3D. It could easily form the focal point of a living-room setup. I rate it a *bona fide* bargain ●

→ Analysis



GUI: Sony is sticking with its XMB interface on its 2012 TVs. Browsing the Entertainment Network provides a riot of colour and largescale icons
Killer feature: Considering its assured performance, stylish design and wealth of features, it's hard not to be impressed by this 46in TV's generous £1,200 price tag

→ Specifications

3D: YES Active shutter (glasses not supplied)

Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080

Tuner: YES Freeview HD

Smart TV: YES Sony Entertainment Network

Connections: 4 x HDMI; 1 x component; 1 x D-Sub PC input; 1 x Scart; 2 x USB; 1 x Ethernet

Sound: 2 x 10W

Dimensions (off stand): 1,076(w) x 652(h) x 60(d)mm

Weight (off stand): 14.6kg

Features: Built-in Wi-Fi; Wi-Fi Direct; USB multimedia playback; Dynamic LED edge backlighting; frame dimming; Sony Entertainment Network smart portal featuring BBC iPlayer, Netflix, YouTube, Dailymotion, Demand 5; widgets including Facebook, Twitter and Skype; Motionflow XR 400Hz



HCC VERDICT

Sony KDL-46HX753 → £1,200 Approx
 → Supplier: www.sony.co.uk
 → Tel: 08705 111 999

Highs: Smooth, detailed picture performance; excellent internet TV portal choice; integrated Wi-Fi and Wi-Fi direct mode

Lows: Honky, indistinct audio; no MKV support from USB or across a LAN; minor 3D crosstalk effects

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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WOTAN VIII - 5/5 - AUGUST 2012

HI-FI Choice
"Sweet and smooth" - 4.5/5 - ALTAN VIII

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Unsung Samsung hero

You don't need to pay loads for a 40in TV – opt for a 2D model like this Samsung and you'll have money left over for popcorn, suggests **Steve May**

Despite the evangelical barking of the movie industry, 3D hasn't exactly taken off in the home. The technology has improved, but this year has seen high-profile 3D channels being either shuttered (CanalPlus) or scaled back (DirecTV), with stereoscopy polling low as a reason to buy a new set.

The good news is that if you're prepared to forgo the funny glasses, there are some great 2DTV bargains to be had. This 40in, 'net-enabled Samsung being a case in point.

The UE40EH5300 may lack the waif-like dimensions of high-end LED screens, but at 94.3mm it isn't overly deep. The design is regulation gloss black, with a fashionably thin bezel, and connectivity is fine, including three HDMI and twin USBs.

A smarter portal

The big attraction is Samsung's burgeoning Smart TV portal. Here you'll find an improbable number of downloadable apps (of which about seven hold interest), and a wide selection of catch-up and VOD, including BBC iPlayer, LOVEFiLM, Netflix and YouTube. Indeed, the only noticeable absentee is ITVPlayer.

Browsing this lot is made easy by a bright and breezy user interface, which blends online access with local features, such as the set's AllShare DLNA functionality. This transpires to be first class, making this TV a fine choice for those with files a-plenty. There's also an integrated web browser, but navigating it via the supplied remote control is awkward at best. On the plus side, you get a PiP TV window to entertain you while you struggle.

One consequence of this panel's discounted price tag is that it doesn't have access to the sophisticated MotionPlus processing found further up the Samsung chain. The set's motion resolution is capped at around 800 lines as a result. There's an LED MotionPlus mode, designed to reduce blur, but it doesn't



Mid-range: Samsung's 5 Series model misses out on the brand's high-end tech

fundamentally improve motion clarity and penalises viewing with a drop in brightness. It's best left off.

So while maybe not ideal for sport, the UE40EH5300 works well as a home theatre display. The lack of tricky picture processing means there's no slippery, video sheen to its images. Ryan Reynold's Green Lantern doesn't look like he's making an ill-advised cameo on *EastEnders*.

Image quality attributes include slap-in-the-face dynamics and colour vibrancy. Bright peak whites give the screen a punchy, high-contrast look. Reds tend to be a tad orangey, but the screen does a good job depicting difficult golds and rich wood hues. Blacks are sufficiently deep, and smoothness is a real asset. For best results, ease the backlight down from its default, and avoid setting Sharpness above 10 on the provided scale. And to ensure you're getting the entire picture from HD sources, be sure to select the Screenfit aspect ratio option.

Backlight uniformity is good for an edge-lit LED screen, but off-axis viewing isn't recommended. Colour and contrast take a dive when viewed from the side. The audio performance is a cut-above the norm, presumably because of the slightly deeper cabinet.

So, not cutting-edge, but still terrific bang for your buck – an agreeable blend of cinematic images and tasty extra features ●

→ Specifications

3D: No Not on this mid-range set

Full HD: Yes 1,920 x 1,080

Tuner: Yes Freeview HD

Smart TV: Yes Smart Hub

Connections: 3 x HDMI; 1 x component; 2 x USB; 1 x Scart; 1 x Ethernet; 1 x optical digital audio output

Sound: 2 x 10W

Brightness (claimed): NA

Contrast (claimed): NA

Dimensions (off stand): 1,059(w) x 626(h) x 94.3(d)mm

Weight (off stand): 12.5kg

Features: USB media playback (JPEG, MP3, FLAC, AVI, MKV, MOV, WMV, WMA support); Smart Hub featuring BBC iPlayer, YouTube, LOVEFiLM etc; web browser; built-in Wi-Fi; AllShare Play; wide colour enhancer; LED MotionPlus mode

AV/CV

PRODUCT: 2D Smart LED LCD TV

POSITION: Mid-range in Samsung's stable

PEERS: Sony KDL-40EX653; LG 47LM620T

HCC VERDICT

Samsung UE40EH5300 → £600
Approx → Supplier: www.samsung.co.uk → Tel: 0330 7267864

Highs: High-impact picture quality; well-populated online Smart TV portal; excellent file support

Lows: No high-speed MotionPlus picture processing; deeper cabinet than best-in-breed LEDs

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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Digital déjà vu

Onkyo's new TX-NR515 AV receiver marries full-bodied audio with a heady mix of features. There's nothing new there, says **Danny Phillips**

When it comes to AV receivers, Onkyo campaigns to be the people's champion. Every year its entry-level models come packed to the hilt with features, sporting a competitive price tag and, more often than not, a nailed-on sound quality, too. This commitment to value has made Onkyo the best-selling home cinema receiver brand for four years running, which kinda tells you everything you need to know.

And with the TX-NR515, the second-best specced model in its latest cluster of entry-level AV receivers, Onkyo looks to be continuing down the same path. For £500 it offers most of the latest mod cons, including network functionality with Spotify, web radio and DLNA streaming, 3D-passthrough and Dolby Pro Logic IIz. It's also 'futureproofed' for the next generation of hi-def TVs, courtesy of Marvell's 4K-upscaling QDEO technology.

This 7.2-channel affair replaces last year's TX-NR579. Onkyo says it kicks out 130W-per-channel, although this is quoted into 6 Ohms, with just a single channel driven. As usual with affordable AVRs, you can assume a more realistic five- or seven-channel performance to be considerably less.

Subtle tweak

Elsewhere on the spec sheet the TX-NR515 represents more of a subtle tweak than a radical overhaul, with Onkyo clearly taking an 'if it ain't broke...' approach. There are some new features to report, though, primarily MHL (Mobile High Definition Link), which allows you to playback 1080p video and photos with surround sound from smartphones and other portable devices.

On the outside there's very little difference, too. As ever there's a sartorial choice of black or silver and build quality is pretty much what you'd expect – fairly solid but without

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
7.2-channel
entry-level AVR

POSITION:
Below the
TX-NR616 in
Onkyo's 2012
stable

PEERS:
Yamaha
RX-V673;
Pioneer
VSX-922

touching the bullet-proof levels that you get from more expensive models. The front panel is nice and tidy, confining most of the buttons to the fascia's ridges and grooves. With no pull down flap, everything is exposed, including the front HDMI, composite, USB (for iPods and memory devices), setup mic and headphone sockets – keep away from inquisitive fingers. The front HDMI is the conduit for MHL and is labelled as such.

On the back are seven more HDMI inputs and twin outputs to allow simultaneous video on two displays. Now, a total of eight HDMI inputs may sound like connection overkill, but it certainly makes sense – there's nothing more irritating than running out of digital ports on what is designed to be the heartbeat of your setup. There are also Zone 2 line outs, four digital audio inputs (two coaxial, two optical) plus USB and Ethernet ports offering two different ways of getting online – for the

Movie machine: Onkyo's new receiver laps up film soundtracks





former Onkyo sells a wireless LAN adapter, leaving that front port free for USB media playback. Via this medium, the TX-NR515 supports MP3, WMA, WMA Lossless, FLAC, WAV, Ogg Vorbis, AAC and LPCM.

Other features that may interest include Spotify music streaming. This is something that some AVR manufacturers see as a big attraction, but note that you'll need a subscription to use it. Other audio streaming options are vTuner, SIMFY,

HD hotbed: The TX-NR515 favours plenty of HDMI inputs over legacy hookups

Other factors to grease the setup wheels include HDMI standby passthrough and InstaPrevue, which provides a live video thumbnail of each source connected via HDMI. There are control Apps available for iOS and Android devices, too – but these do lack the sense of fun and flair of rival Pioneer's offering.

Commendable sound

In action the TX-NR515 is every bit as assured as last year's models. There isn't a massive jump up in quality – rather, Onkyo has simply reproduced the commendable sound of the TX-NR579 and its ilk, offering the same entrancing mixture of polish and power.

With *Super 8* on Blu-ray it proves adept for the money. It delivers the pounding thrills of the train crash sequence without any signs of struggle, from the thumping bottom end as the train passes to the crisp crackle of the fires in the aftermath.

When the impact happens it launches full throttle into the melee of effects – clanking metal panels, wooden buildings being ripped to shreds – hammering them out with gusto. Its sense of scale is impressive. Effects are whipped from speaker to speaker at speed and beautifully placed within the soundstage.

It's not all about brute force either – give it a romantic scene or a peaceful establishing shot and it'll still draw out the detail like iron filings to a magnet. Dialogue has authority.

The TX-NR515 is therefore something of a catch, with impressive sound quality and plenty of likeable features. It's worth of its 'best-buy' status. But at the same time, you may get a slight feeling that the world's best-selling AVR brand (and presumably the wealthiest) could be doing more to drive the humble home cinema receiver forward, rather than simply going over and improving old ground. Something for 2013, eh? ●

Remote: Sensibly laid-out and refreshingly uncluttered



'Effects are whipped from speaker to speaker at speed and beautifully placed in the soundfield'

Last.fm, AUPEO! and the cloud-based service MP3tunes.

Sound modes other than Dolby Pro Logic IIz for front height action include a quartet of DSP tweaks for gaming (Rock, Sports, Action and RPG), and three music flavours (Orchestra, Unplugged and Studio-Mix). The Audyssey suite offers the most basic 2EQ calibration, plus Dynamic EQ and Dynamic Volume. Burr Brown 192kHz/24-bit DACs are provided for all channels.

Straightforward

Using the TX-NR515 doesn't throw up too many curveballs. The GUI is a step above the blocky, basic onscreen presentation of yesteryear – although no way near as swish as that of Sony's range-topping STR-DA5700ES (see page 76) – with the Home menu using a row of coloured icons, and all other menus illustrating their options with graphics and easy-to-read fonts. Not cutting-edge, but hardly offensive. And don't let this friendly façade fool you – the UI goes into some serious detail, allowing you to tweak the sound parameters should Audyssey's results let you down.

→Analysis



GUI: Onkyo's UI offers a mixture of coloured icons and simple-to-read text – or you can use the Android/iOS control app (pictured)

Killer feature: The TX-NR515 is well specified – having eight HDMI inputs and a barrage of music services is a real boon

→Specifications

Dolby Digital TrueHD: YES
DTS-HD Master Audio: YES

THX: NO

Multichannel audio: YES 7 x 130W (into 6 Ohms, claimed)

Multichannel input: NO

Multiroom: YES Powered Zone 2
AV inputs: 4 x composite inputs; 5 x analogue stereo; 4 x digital audio inputs (2 x optical and 2 x coaxial)

HDMI input/output: YES 8-in, 2-out, all v1.4

Video upscaling: YES to 4,096 x 2,160

Component input/output: YES 1-in, 1-out

Dimensions: 435(w) x 173.5(h) x 328(d)mm

Weight: 9.2kg

Features: Mobile High Definition Link; Marvell Qdeo upscaling to 4K; Spotify, vTuner, SIMFY, Last.fm, AUPEO!, MP3tunes; DLNA & Windows 7-certified; Audyssey 2EQ auto calibration; InstaPrevue; Dolby Pro Logic IIz; MP3, WMA, FLAC, WAV, Ogg Vorbis, AAC and LPCM support; 2 x sub pre-outs; Advanced Music Optimizer; Onkyo Remote Apps; Direct and Pure Audio modes; 32-bit DSP chip with 4 gaming modes; TI Burr-Brown 192kHz/24-bit DACs for all channels



HCC VERDICT

Onkyo TX-NR515 → £300 Approx

→ Supplier: www.uk.onkyo.com

→ Tel: +49 (0)8142 4208 11

Highs: Assertive, detailed movie performance; good music streaming features; easy to use

Lows: Control app and UI not cutting-edge; not a massive leap from last year's model

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Taming the giant

The 65in version of Panasonic's flagship VT50 is more than just a bigscreen barnstormer. It's Smart and accommodating too, says **Steve May**



For such a monstrous TV, the 65in version of Panasonic's premium VT50 line is surprisingly easy to live with. The edge-to-edge glass design, with stylish metallic trim, makes it more arty furniture than appliance, while the lack of significant bezel helps it fit a relatively compact space. The fact that it delivers near-reference quality hi-def is almost a bonus.

The set features both Freeview HD and Freesat tuners. There's usually little to choose between them when it comes to *gratis* channel choice, and I suspect offering both hasn't proved a big selling point for Panasonic.

However, this duality came into its own during the London Olympics, when Freesat, unlike Freeview, offered all 24 BBC channels. When my Sky box was maxed-out recording, the set still allowed a full sporting *smorgasbord* to be consumed. Worth bearing in mind for 2016 – assuming by then that TV isn't solely being delivered via the internet...

Connect and serve

With four HDMI, component/composite video, three USBs and Ethernet, there's not much missing off the back. Both Wi-Fi and

Bluetooth are integrated; the latter used with a secondary touchpad controller (supplied). There's also an SD card slot for quickfire JPEG viewing and a fully-enabled USB media reader. The latter plays all popular video files, including MKV, AVI, MOV, MP3 and FLAC, although MKV, AVCHD and DivX do not play across a LAN.

New this year is a dual-core processor, on hand to better integrate linear TV services with on-demand and catch-up. Up to six key apps, such as BBC iPlayer, Netflix and YouTube, can be accessed via shortcuts within the VIERA Connect

Monstrous: Panasonic's 65in plasma is one of the biggest TV's available

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
Flagship 65in
3D plasma

POSITION:
The biggest
model in
Panasonic's
VT50 line

PEERS:
LG 65LM620T;
Samsung
UE55ES8000

portal. Just hit the VIERA Tools button on the remote and the screen curls up like the page of a book to reveal ready-to-launch IPTV services. Very swish.

A question of image

Picture quality veers toward the mesmeric. The TX-P65VT50 offers deep, nuanced blacks, prickly fine detail and a rich colour palette. The brand's latest Infinite Black Ultra filter appears to avoid the more thunderously dark overtones of last year's VT30, helping the set excel with both general entertainment as well as movies. However, there is a level of fizzy pixel noise in blacks which can be distracting, particularly when viewed close. I found this evident, to a lesser or greater extent, in all viewing modes, with the exception of the Cinema preset.

When it comes to calibration, there are plenty of tweaks available, including enough control to earn the Panasonic plasma certification from the ISF. If you're paying out this much for a TV, I suggest you consider that route.

Two pairs of Active Shutter 3D glasses are included in the box. Panasonic has dramatically reduced the weight (and cost) of its 3D spex, but I can't say that these glasses are particularly comfortable. The nose bridge is unforgiving and they're prone to reflection, with video images smearily duplicated at the extreme edge of your horizontal and vertical peripheral vision. Once seen this trait is quite difficult to detune – a shame as the set's 3D performance is actually terrific. There's some loss of brightness, but images remain punchy and I wasn't troubled by intrusive crosstalk. When a fly inadvertently buzzes in front of the camera during an interview in David Attenborough's exquisite *Flying Monsters* (Sky+ 3D HD) you can't help but flinch, such is its realism. 3D motion effects are also a good deal smoother and more convincing. While stereoscopic animation is generally acceptable on all 3D screens, live action is harder to pull off. Here though, depth and movement appear totally convincing – especially at this mammoth size.



Snug fit: The screen depth of 50mm makes it easy to accommodate

Motion handling is excellent across the board, thanks to IFC (Intelligent Frame Creation) and the brand's new 2,500Hz Focused Field Drive. IFC has traditionally been a necessary evil on Panasonic plasmas, crucial to maintaining motion resolution but also responsible for motion artefacts, seen as shimmering halos around certain objects. Ramped up high it also robs movies of cinematic texture. But the performance of the TX-P65VT50 is a big step forward.

Even with IFC off, motion resolution

reaches 1000 lines, although images become grainy. Engage IFC on its minimum setting, and this grain vanishes and detail hits a full 1080 lines; artefacts are unperceivable. Such adept processing really came into its own during the London games, when clarity and speed were essential bedfellows.

But there are caveats when it comes to owning a TX-P65VT50. Significantly, its audio performance is poor, an inevitable consequence of that slimline, bezel-lite design. The main stereo speakers, which fire rearward, are driven by a gutless 4W digital amp, leaving a 10W 100mm woofer to do all the work. The result is a largely monophonic soundstage firmly anchored behind the screen.

This larger NeoPlasma panel also incorporates two fans as part of its heat management system. Although quiet, they are immediately obvious when the set is powered up. During low-key content, I was acutely aware of their thrum.

And, finally, there's the nagging feeling that, if you're spending nearly £4,000 on a TV, you might want to seriously investigate a projector and screen setup.

It's a knockout

Ultimately, though, if you're looking for a cutting-edge largescreen TV, the TX-P65VT50 takes some beating. Not only is its picture performance a knockout, it's rich in real-world convenience features.

Big, beautiful and most definitely handy, we rate it the televisual equivalent of Nigella Lawson

→Analysis



GUI: The TX-P65VT50 makes use of Panasonic's new dual core functionality to add some much-needed flair to its menus
Killer feature: At 65in, this plasma comes close to the bigscreen thrills offered by a projector – and brings much more functionality to the party

→Specifications

3D: YES Active Shutter, two pairs of glasses supplied

Full HD: YES 1,920 x 1,080

Tuner: YES Freeview HD; Freesat HD

Smart portal: YES Viera Connect

Connections: 4 x HDMI; 1 x component (via adaptor); SD card slot; Ethernet; 3 x USB; Scart via adaptor; CI slot; optical digital audio output

Sound: 18W (2 x 4W, 1 x 10W)

Brightness: NA

Contrast ratio: 6,000,000:1

Dimensions (off stand): 1,499(w) x 891(h) x 50.5(d)mm

Weight (off stand): 42.5kg

Features: Dual Core processor; integrated Wi-Fi; 2,500Hz Focused Field Drive; SD card/USB HDD timeshifting; USB media playback; DLNA content sharing; VIERA Connect portal featuring BBC iPlayer, Netflix, YouTube, Dailymotion, Acetrex, BBC News, Fetch TV, Facebook, Twitter, Skype & more; HTML5 browser

Remote:

The TV is bundled with this traditional handset and a touchpad



HCC VERDICT

Panasonic TX-P65VT50 → £3,800
Approx → Supplier: www.panasonic.co.uk → Tel: 0844 844 3899

Highs: Sparkling HD performance; generously equipped Smart portal; good multimedia file support; crosstalk-free 3D

Lows: Monophonic audio; obvious fan noise; pixel noise in dark scenes; you can get a projector and screen for less

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Great balls of fire!

Elipson shakes up the sub/sat market with its striking-looking Planet M 5.1 package – giving **Ed Selley** the chance to bring some style to his setup

Ever since the arrival of the original KEF eggs nearly a decade ago, sub/sat packages have come in some interesting shapes and sizes. Spherical satellite speakers have been released before but few of them have the pedigree behind the baubles you see here. As one of the oldest French electronics brands, Elipson has been making spherical speakers for longer than many of its competitors have existed.

The thinking behind a speaker this shape is more scientific than aesthetics. A sphere offers the most efficient shape possible to enclose a driver. There is also no specific point of resonance, which reduces cabinet colouration to a minimum.

The Planet M is a diminutive version of the existing Planet L. Each satellite is a 6in-diameter sphere packing a 4in paper mid-bass driver with a 0.75in soft dome tweeter placed coaxially. The driver is

relatively large for a satellite and this gives the Planet M a useful low-end frequency response down to 90Hz.

The design is sealed and the only objects that protrude from the cabinet are the pair of terminals at the rear. This means that the Planet M is happy parked on shelves or close to the wall. The grill is fixed in place, which technically might create some colouration, but I've also used the larger Planet L where you can remove the grill and the effect is negligible.

AV/CV

PRODUCT: 5.1 sub/sat system with designer looks

POSITION: Smaller than the Planet L models in the Elipson range

PEERS: Cambridge Audio Minx; Bowers & Wilkins MT60



As you might imagine, Elipson has put some thought into mounting options. Left to its own devices, a ball will do what a ball does best and roll off whatever surface it's placed on. As such, each Planet M is supplied with a steel mounting ring allowing you to plonk the Elipsons on a flat surface. The other mounting options are impressively comprehensive as well. Floorstand? Check. Wallmount? But of course. Ceiling mount? Naturally. 'Sound Tree' installation for mounting multiple Planets in an artistic sculpture? Er, yes, they've got one of those, too. The last one probably won't be of much use in a home cinema context but you never know when you might want to re-function your Planets.

Partnering the satellites is the Planet Sub. This is a more conventional design than the

satellites and features a downward firing 8in driver powered by a 200W Class D amp. Controls are limited to volume control, crossover and a phase switch. Any EQing you might desire will need to be applied at the receiver end. The footprint of the subwoofer is reasonably compact, and although there is a large rear port, it seemed happy enough on axis with the fronts about 15 centimetres from my wall. The only curiosity is that there is no on/off switch, only an auto on/off control.

The fit and finish is, for the most part, excellent. Everything feels solid and the satellites in particular are wonderfully substantial objects. The paint, in particular, is flawless and if the red finish of these review samples is a little sudden for you, black and white flavours are also available. Furthermore, as Planet Ms are available both as singles and pairs and can be mixed and matched with the larger Planet L, this is an extremely flexible system, especially with

the variety of mounting options. The looks do divide opinion, though. I'm a huge fan but over the time the Planets were installed in my house, I met a fair few people who were less convinced. And, let's be honest, the cylindrical subwoofer does look a bit like a kitchen bin...

Intergalactic audio

Any doubters are likely to be convinced after actually listening to the Planet M array. The system's design brings a number of advantages, including the dual-concentric arrangements of the drivers and the seamless crossover afforded by having five identical satellites. Most important is the use of that 4in midbass driver. Each Planet M has sufficient heft in its own right to feel more like a bookshelf speaker than a dinky satellite and this greatly aids the performance.

With *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, this positive attribute was shown to good effect. The mass of sonic detail in the ape house is

Get a round in:

The spherical satellite design should reduce cabinet colouration





No rock 'n' roll:

Each Planet M is supplied with a steel ring – other mounting options are available

captured with exceptional clarity. It is easy to distinguish the voices of individual apes and you get a sense of the scale of the building as well.

Above all it is the tonality of the satellites that is most impressive. Paper midbass drivers and soft dome tweeters are hardly bleeding-edge technology – they are a long way from it in fact – but used well, they have a fabulously natural and even-handed performance. Voices – be they man or monkey – are rich and entirely real. They can also be pushed extremely hard without hardening. Running at suitably boisterous levels, the Planets present a fast, cohesive soundstage that is

very little of themselves to the sound – the effect is only really noticeable when you switch back to conventional boxes.

Elipson's subwoofer does a good job of keeping up with the satellites, producing an agile and relatively clean presentation. Pushed hard, it can get a little boomy, but this is not an issue at the sort of levels that will convincingly fill a lounge. For the asking price of the Planet Sub it is possible to buy alternative models that offer a little more depth and slam, but this is a competitive design for the asking price and a stylistic match. The only curiosity is that the auto on/off switch is a little insensitive. The output as defined by auto setup was not always enough to trigger the switch. By increasing the level at the amp, and backing off the volume on the sub, I was able to bypass this, however.

Much to like

There is much to like about this system. Elipson has put in a considerable amount of effort and the result is a clever satellite that's unfussy in terms of placement and, thanks to the various mounting options, easy to accommodate. The dual concentric drivers give a rich and natural performance that is likeable and suited to a wide range of material. In fact, they outshine the subwoofer, which gives some ground to other designs but still does a creditable job. If you're looking for a system with both a striking appearance and impressive sonics, this should be on your shortlist.

'Elipson's system delivers a rich and natural performance suited to a wide range of material'

extremely likeable. Really hardened action fans might want a bit more bite and attack but these make for an excellent all-rounder.

This naturalness is at its best if you are intending to use the Planets for music as well as movies. In both stereo and multichannel mode, they have an impressive sense of timing that combines with their naturalness to give a very entertaining performance. They manage to sound entirely cohesive from top to bottom, which is never a given for sub/sat packages, and evidence that Elipson knows what it's doing. The spherical cabinets add

→ Specifications

Elipson Planet M

Drive units: 1 x 4in paper cone midbass driver with 1 x coaxially-mounted 0.75in soft dome tweeter
Enclosure: Sealed
Frequency response: 90Hz–22kHz
Sensitivity: 88dB
Power handling: 60W
Dimensions: 150(w) x 150(h) x 150(d)mm
Weight: 1.6kg

Elipson Planet Sub

Drive units: 1 x 8in downward-firing fabric-coated paper woofer
Enclosure: Ported
Frequency response: 30Hz–240Hz
On board power: 200W Class D
Remote control: NO
Dimensions: 319(w) x 395(h) x 400(d)mm
Weight: 11.5kg
Connections: Stereo line-level input; mono line-level input; speaker-level inputs



HCC VERDICT

Elipson Planet M 5.1 → £1,300 Approx
 → Supplier: www.elipson.com
 → Tel: 01923 205600

Highs: Clever design and great build; excellent tonality with both film and music material; flexible setup options

Lows: Not the most ballistic performer; looks divide opinion

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

One for the tweekers

Adrian Justins tackles his TV picture with Datacolor's newest colorimeter/software package – and is impressed with the results



Superhero:
The Spyder4TV HD aims to improve your flatscreen's picture

Screen calibration involves a lot more than choosing the correct aspect ratio and taming your set's image processing engine. It's no wonder there are professional TV installers willing to optimise your display in exchange for a not so small fee.

This DIY screen calibration tool is more affordable and can (should) be re-used periodically or whenever a new screen is bought. It uses a colorimeter that attaches to the screen and works in conjunction with analytical software to calibrate the brightness, contrast, colour, tint and colour temperature of your screen. A series of test charts are supplied on Blu-ray and DVD (both NTSC and PAL formats), only some of which are needed for the calibration.

You obviously require a computer to run the software (which is supplied on CD-ROM), using a fairly recent version of Windows XP, Windows 7 or Mac OSX. And the computer needs to be physically near the screen as it's tethered to the colorimeter by an approximately 2m-long USB cord. Datacolor's device gets its name from the arachnoid appearance of the colorimeter clinging to the screen, courtesy of eight bungee cords that hook over the corners. Installing the software is hassle-free.



Prior to calibration, switch the screen to its standard picture mode. Start the software and enter the minimum and maximum numerical values, plus the current setting, for contrast, brightness, colour intensity, colour tint and colour temperature. I tested the Spyder4TV HD on two sets: a Panasonic TX-L42WT50 and a Samsung UE-40ES6000. The Panasonic doesn't use numerical values for its menus, which are purely graphical, so I had to take an empirical approach and approximate.

Only values that use a sliding scale can be calibrated, which meant I couldn't adjust either model's colour temperature or the tint on the Panasonic, which is broken down into individual RGB components.

Calibrating each parameter is a case of honing in on the optimum setting, increasing or decreasing along the scale as the colorimeter takes readings from the relevant test image and the software completes its analysis. It involves around 25 minutes of button pushing but ends with a printable report that shows graphically how your screen's best settings were chosen.

The precision of the system requires fine adjustments so it was impossible to properly tweak the Viera but the Samsung screen definitely looked better post-calibration. I felt the Spyder's recommended colour setting to be a bit too high (maybe because colour temperature hadn't been calibrated) but once corrected I felt that I was truly seeing the screen at its best. Sport, drama and movies all seemed effortlessly natural, with the strong colours of green grass and red football shirts especially impressive.

Recommended, but strictly for screens that have numerical values in their settings ●

→ Specifications

Colorimeter: YES

Software on CD-ROM: YES

System requirements: Windows (XP 32/64, Vista 32/64, Windows 7 32/64) and Mac OSX (10.4 or higher); 256MB of free RAM; 100MB free drive space; 1024 x 768 resolution video card; 24 bpp colour (16.7 million colours)

Features: Blu-ray and DVD (PAL/NTSC) test pattern discs; compatible with LCD/LED, plasma, OLED, CRT and front projectors; Spyder Web attachment; Quick start guide in 10 languages; two-year hardware warranty; free online support

AV/CV

PRODUCT:
Screen calibration system

POSITION:
Sits alongside computer monitor calibrators in Datacolor's range

PEERS:
Various test discs – but these don't use colorimeters

HCC VERDICT

Datacolor Spyder4TV HD → £100
Approx → Supplier: www.datacolor.com → Tel: 0800 043 3119

Highs: Logical step-by-step process; elegant interface; excellent results when it works

Lows: Onscreen menus must use numerical values; only sets five parameters

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

LG's box of tricks

This second-generation 'Smart TV upgrader' is a couple of VOD services away from excellence, says **Grant Rennell**



This 'Smart TV upgrader' from LG is a standalone media player which adds most of the features and functionality of the manufacturer's current TV portal to any HDMI-equipped TV, including 3D content if your telly can hack it.

About the same size as a paperback book, the SP820 sports little up front save a moody *Battlestar Galactica*-esque red power light. Connections hide around the back, with an HDMI v1.4 output joined by an optical digital audio out, Ethernet jack and two USB connectors. Having one of the latter on the front panel would be better.

Adding a touch of Nintendo Wii-style novelty is the inclusion of LG's rather impressive Magic remote, which enables fairly precise mouse-like navigation of the menus, and included web browser, via an onscreen cursor. Minimal button pressing is required and text can be entered using an onscreen keyboard. Smartphone owners can use an app if they'd rather.

The interface is neatly designed with 'lean back' TV use in mind. Much like Samsung's Smart Hub UI, LG's offering manages to cram in plenty of options on the Home screen without being too overwhelming, due to the use of easily identifiable and sensibly grouped icons. A scrolling nav bar along the bottom lists the most useful apps and options, the box remembers those you've used recently, and you can keyword search across YouTube, the web or apps.

The SP820 offers no hard disk onboard but you can play media

Sci-fi styling: LG's designers may have been inspired by BSG's Cylons...

(or 'SmartShare') from USB attached storage or DLNA-networked devices (Wi-Fi comes built-in). A software CD is included with Nero's MediaHome 4 Essentials for agreeably no-fuss media sharing. The player successfully streamed from my Windows 7 PC and networked Western Digital MyBook World Edition II NAS drive.

Format support is broad (but doesn't run to FLAC) and 1080p video looked as sharp as expected, including when streamed. Files can be browsed by category in thumbnail view, with folders and any included artwork displayed.

A reasonable app roster boasts the likes of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Acetrax, LOVEFILM (but not Netflix), Picasa, Cinetrailers, ITN News, and iConcerts (music clips and docs). However, some, such as Cartoon Network and Box Office 365, were not available in the UK at time of writing and a few, such as one devoted to Korean pop music, could be described as esoteric. A '3D World' section features stereoscopic clips on demand. Free and pay apps including basic games can be downloaded but the line-up is comparatively limited. BBC iPlayer, for example, isn't supported, but should arrive soon.

Standing out

For sheer ease of use, compatibility and performance, LG's SP820 remains one of the better media players available in an increasingly crowded market. The lack of Netflix and iPlayer is annoying, but don't let that stop you checking it out ●

AV/CV
PRODUCT: Media player with LG Smart TV functionality
POSITION: This second-generation box replaces the ST600
PEERS: Sony SMP-N200; Netgear NeoTV 550; A.C. Ryan Veolo

→ Specifications

HDD: No but USB external drives are supported

Connections: 1 x HDMI v1.4; Ethernet; 2 x USB 2.0; optical digital audio

Video file format support: MPEG-2; MPEG-4 AVC (H.264); SMPTE VC1 (VC-9); DivX; DivX HD; MKV; TS TP; WMV; 3GPP; FLV

Audio file format support: MP3; WMA; Dolby Digital; Dolby Digital Plus; HE-AAC

Dimensions: 200(w) x 29(h) x 120(d)mm

Features: Magic remote control; 3D-ready; Facebook; Twitter; Acetrax; LOVEFILM; YouTube; web browser; app store; thumbnail navigation (photos, cover art); photo slideshows; DLNA networking; built-in Wi-Fi (g/n); smartphone remote app available

HCC VERDICT

LG SP820 → £180 approx
→ Supplier: www.lg.com/uk
→ Tel: 0844 847 5454

Highs: TV-friendly interface; Magic remote; good format support

Lows: No iPlayer or Netflix yet; app store needs more/better apps; no USB on front panel

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

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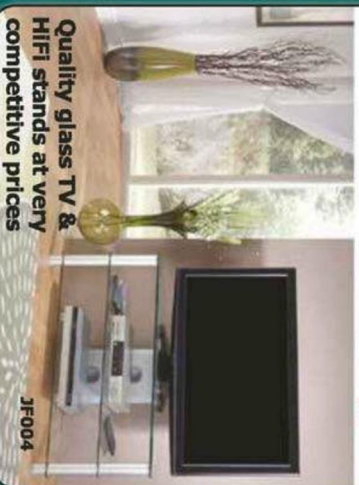
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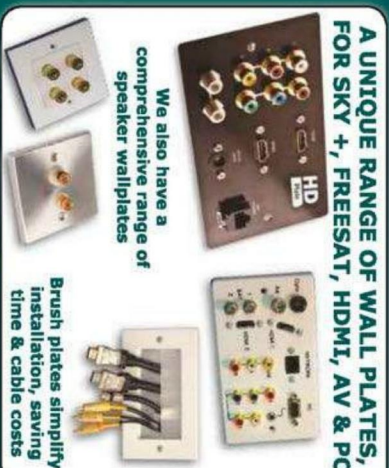


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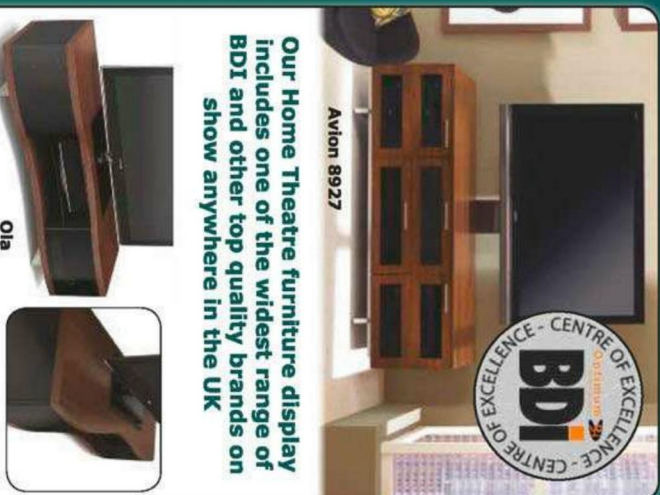


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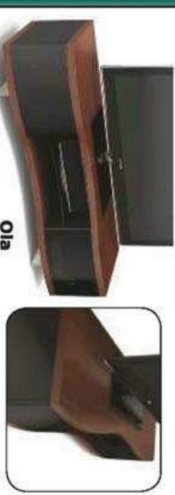
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Something in the air tonight

Adrian Justins auditions five AirPlay speakers to find out which one is most worthy of his digital music collection



ALTEC LANSING INAIR 5000

£350 Approx

Altec Lansing's teardrop-shaped cabinet packs a pair of tweeters, two mid-range drivers and a dedicated 4in woofer, so hopefully it will sound as good as it looks...

AUDYSSEY AUDIO DOCK AIR

£300 Approx

From the American tech wizards behind the well-respected auto-calibration software comes this industrial-looking dock. Can Audyssey have as much success with AirPlay as it does AVR's?

LOGITECH UE AIR SPEAKER

£300 Approx

Logitech has had previous success with Bluetooth speakers – now it comes to the AirPlay party with a sleekly-designed unit that still retains the dedicated iPod dock of yesteryear

PHILIPS FIDELIO SOUNDCURVE DS8800W

£350 Approx

The name's a mouthful, but Philips' latest wireless speaker sports an eye-catching design that's claimed to improve the performance of its twin full-range driver array

TEUFEL ITEUFEL AIR

£400 Approx

The biggest and most expensive entrant in our group test promises to bring the German brand's hard-hitting audio expertise to the AirPlay arena – but will its relative bulk count against it in the style stakes?

Teardrop tearaway

Altec Lansing's InAir 5000 offers both style and substance



Double trouble: Even the supplied remote control sports neat curves

With the migration from physically constrained docking stations to wirelessly connected speakers, product designers are free to indulge in a little spatial creativity. The teardrop profile of the InAir 5000, for example, simply wouldn't work with an iPod dock attached.

And with a sleek metal trim along its top edge, in the design stakes at least, the InAir 5000 is already over the finishing line. You even get a brushed metal remote to match.

Build quality is very good and there's some impressive driver action going on behind the soft grille, with dual Kevlar mid-range cones, two neodymium tweeters and a rear-firing 4in subwoofer. Like the iTeufel Air, the InAir 5000 uses three dedicated amplifiers to power the low-, mid- and high-end, with a combined rating of 120W. There's no battery option, but the unit is much more portable than the Teufel and can easily be relocated to other rooms in your house.

Another nice design flourish is that the unit emits a broad coloured glow from its underside, rather than use an LED behind the grille, to transmit visual status information. Connectivity is exemplary, including

a 3.5mm aux line in, Ethernet and a USB, which can be used to charge iPods and iPhones but not an iPad. Unusually, there's a headphone jack, which is handy for listening to iTunes from a computer located elsewhere without disturbing other people in the same room as you.

Setting up is the most user-friendly process around: you download the InAir Guide app from iTunes, connect your iDevice to the speaker using the USB connection, launch the app and you're then asked to choose your network and rename the speaker. Simple as that.

Not the fastest

The main weakness of AirPlay is that wireless connections can be unreliable and interrupting music playback is particularly irritating. It's also not the fastest protocol at establishing inter-device communication and, whilst not disastrous, the InAir 5000 seemed more prone to network interference than most.

The InAir 5000 is certainly capable of delivering a wide dynamic range, particularly at low to mid volumes where bass frequency response is especially impressive without compromising vocals and

top-end sounds. Neon Neon's *Dream Cars*, for example, has tremendously rich bass and Oasis's *Little By Little* is full, tight and controlled. Crank things up and the dynamic starts to feel a little compressed and the bass becomes over dominant – Radiohead's *Karma Police* has a pulsating bass that starts to feel uncomfortable at high volumes. No such trouble with America's *A Horse With No Name*, whose acoustics are nicely delivered.

More contemporary sounds are handled with aplomb. Akon's *Beautiful*, for example, is a superbly dynamic experience, with his high-pitched vocals meshing effortlessly with the synth track and delightful high hat.

In all, this is a very accomplished effort – stylish and smart-sounding.

Seventy years of sound

Altec Lansing has been knocking out audio products since the early 1940s, starting with power amplifiers, but more recently has risen to prominence as the world's leading PC audio brand. Also sitting alongside various desktop speakers in the company's product range are in-ear headphones, iPod docks in numerous shapes and sizes and a duo of network audio devices. Of the latter, the InAir 5000 tested here supports AirPlay, while the InMotion Air IMW725 is, somewhat confusingly, Bluetooth based.

Made in Manhattan

Can Audyssey successfully branch out into the personal audio market?



Audyssey is a name many HCC readers will associate with the company's MultEQ audio calibration technology and other processing trickery that features on many makes of multichannel receiver. This Audio Dock Air is the brand's first AirPlay speaker.

Audyssey's design team has plumped for an orthodox box shape, albeit one with an industrial edge, including a grey metal outer casing. Style-wise, the Audio Dock Air will look more at home in a wooden-floored warehouse conversion than a period mansion in the rolling countryside – but even then it's hardly the most eye-catching design. Audyssey even gave the speaker an alternative name at launch, calling it the Lower East Side Audio Dock Air, but now there is no mention of the New York-inspired moniker to be found on the company's website. Perhaps it realised that the name was too parochial.

The Dock Air speaker is a solid chunk of equipment, impressively compact for a box that contains two 0.75in silk-dome tweeters, two 3.5in drivers and two 4in passive bass radiators. The passive bass radiators combine with Audyssey's proprietary BassXT processing to force more air out of the speaker, resulting supposedly in deeper bass than anything else at this size.

Well-disguised controls are comprised of a volume dial on the top side, adjacent to LEDs for power and AirPlay. Connections include a 3.5mm headphone jack, 3.5mm auxiliary line input and the power cable socket for the external power supply. There's no means of charging an iDevice, as the sole USB (on the speaker's underside) is for effecting software updates only. Audyssey is not alone in keeping visual status information to simply the glow of one or two tiny lamps and there's no harm in that, but the volume control

has no markings and it rotates ambiguously so that you're never sure where you are on the scale. Thankfully, once it's set to a reasonable level you can make further alterations from the volume control in iTunes or your iPod. A simple press of the volume dial instantly mutes the speaker.

Got the hotspot for you

Setting up the Audio Dock Air is achieved by pressing the Pair button to generate a Wi-Fi hotspot, selecting this temporarily as your network and latching the speaker on to your home's network via a browser-located settings page. There's a four-minute wait while protocols are agreed but then you're up and running. One caveat is that it took a few goes to get the dock to play ball with an iPod running iOS 4.2, although it always appeared as a selectable AirPlay speaker. There were no such problems, however, with iTunes on a Windows 7 Netbook or iMac.

In performance terms, the Audyssey's stereo imaging is not as effective as might be hoped from the 45-degree angled speakers, but the sound generated is certainly a lot bigger and fuller than the Audio Dock Air looks capable of producing. The emphasis is on mid to low frequencies, with a lack of high-frequency sparkle. Gary Numan's voice on *Cars* feels just a tad swamped. Acoustic tracks aren't ideal partners for the coloured processing, either, but for room-filling party sounds you could do far worse.

American idol:

The Audio Dock Air is Audyssey's first attempt at an AirPlay speaker

Changing tack

Audyssey is known throughout home cinema circles primarily for its automatic room EQ technology employed by some of the world's leading AVR manufacturers, including Denon and Onkyo. Yet it has begun to develop technology more suited to mass-market consumers, such as Audyssey Dynamic Volume on TV, and its new range of speaker products, which includes the Audio Dock Air, desktop PC speakers and a Bluetooth dock. At this rate, we wouldn't be surprised to see Audyssey tackling the headphones market next.

What's up, dock?

This AirPlay speaker touts an old-fashioned physical dock



Borrowed from Batman: The UE Air Speaker sports wing-shaped styling

The UE Air Speaker (the UE component of the name stems from Logitech's Ultimate Ears range of headphones) is not the brand's first attempt at making a splash in the wireless speaker waters, following a couple of previous Bluetooth models.

This AirPlay offering might not be the most exciting design in the world, but it is solidly made with a pleasing stingray shape when seen from above. The rear panel, unusually, boasts an Ethernet socket, plus a USB, external DC power input (there's no battery-operated option) and 3.5mm aux line inputs.

The UE Air Speaker offers no remote control and little onboard visual information, with just three buttons on the top including a rotating disc for controlling volume that rather lacks precision. The muting button and power on/off button with a sleep option are less woolly. Status information is communicated visually by the colour of a tiny LED on the front of the dock tray, which is dead centre on the front.

Moving logically forward

Born during the early 1980s in Switzerland, Logitech will be a familiar name to those with an interest in computing – it began life making mice, which, in 1981, were at the cutting-edge of consumer technology. Now, though, the company's scope extends far beyond basic PC add-ons, with a product range including THX-certified 5.1 speaker systems – designed for computer use but more than potent enough for a small-scale home cinema. Its current lineup of docks and streamers ranges in price from £40 to £400.

Most AirPlay speaker manufacturers have ditched physical docks but, by including a 30-pin connection, Logitech makes setup as simple as possible. All you have to do is plonk your iOS device on the connector and select to install the UE App (your iOS device must be connected to the same network on which you want to operate the speaker). The app lets you rename the speaker and asks for the network password. From here on you can stream music wirelessly or, if you're shamelessly old-fashioned, use the dock, which is also the speaker's only means of charging your 'Pad or 'Pod. The speaker has (like most others) no physical means of adjusting the equalisation but the app does allow some rudimentary tweaking of the bass and treble.

Sitting on the dock

Once the UE Air Speaker is on your network you can also access it from iTunes playing on a computer – if you haven't got an iOS device, but want to stream music just from a PC or Mac, you just need to follow the browser-based procedure that involves pressing the Wi-Fi button on the Logitech's rear of the speaker in order for the UE to generate its own

ad-hoc network. It's a straightforward enough process to get the speaker on to your network.

Performance shouldn't be affected by the presence of any devices mounted on the dock as the UE's stereo speaker implementation (the unit packs two tweeters and two woofers) is widely spaced, so that their sound remains unobstructed.

In full flight the UE Air speaker is actually very impressive. Like its Philips rival in this group, this is a small box capable of producing a surprisingly big sound. The synthesized riff of Numan's *Cars* doesn't feel quite as free and expansive by comparison with the Philips but in insulation the speaker seems like it is capable of keeping bass nice and tight. Another motoring-based 80s-sounding piece of music, Neon's *Dream Cars*, is delivered with verve and punch.

Logitech's speaker can also be driven harder than is aurally required before the cut and thrust of Rainbow's thrashing guitars, or the exquisite vocals on Depeche Mode's *Home*, start to blow out.

So, while the design might not be to everyone's taste, the UE Speaker's sound quality and integrated dock make it a tempting choice.

Holely convincing

Philips' focus on the wireless music industry is paying dividends



No right angles: Philips' round-edged cabinet should help reduce internal resonance

Not many companies have embraced the wireless speaker market as enthusiastically as Philips, whose Fidelio brand features some unconventional designs, including the letterbox style DS8800W. Its drivers are housed around the central cavity and are covered by a soft-touch cloth, while the rear combines a piano black plastic cabinet with an aluminium stand.

It's all rather unorthodox and in keeping with its SoundCurve name there isn't a right angle to be seen. This fluid look isn't just about aesthetics, though. Philips argues it creates a more effective structure for acoustics: the curved edges increase the stiffness of the speaker cabinet, dramatically reducing internal resonance and resulting in a more precise sound reproduction.

Around the back is a USB port that can (only) be used for charging external devices. There's also a 3.5mm aux input and a Wi-Fi button that's used during setup. On the front are basic volume controls and a power button that changes colour according to the unit's status.

There seems to be myriad ways of setting up AirPlay speakers so that

they join your network and the DS8800W offers two paths. The more automated approach only works if you have a WPS (Wi-Fi Protected Setup) compatible router. WPS, which is neither common nor 100 per cent secure, is a Bluetooth-style pairing effected by simply pressing two buttons, but you'll most likely have to use the more longwinded option. Here, you press and hold down the Wi-Fi button and the unit then sets up its own Wi-Fi network. On your iOS device you then choose Philips Fidelio Airplay from the list of available networks and enter an IP number in the device's browser. Once logged on to the DS8800W's server you select your home's wireless network and enter your password. It's a bit of a chore but only needs to be done the once, and it means that the DS8800W (if switched on) will always appear in the list of AirPlay devices within iTunes on a computer or during music playback on an iOS device.

A pebble-shaped zapper allows you to switch between wireless and wired aux inputs and to turn the unit on or off. Note that after switching off you have to re-connect from the playback device. Grr.

The DS8800W proves to be something of a revelation in terms of its performance. It's particularly adept with more acoustic sounds and vocals; *A Horse With No Name* (America) and *Norwegian Wood* (The Beatles), for example, are controlled and balanced with a decent stereo image. The mid-range is nice and lively but switching to Gary Numan's *Cars* and cranking it up a bit results in synth sounds that are a bit too shrill.

Bass reproduction is curiously inconsistent. Rainbow's *Since You've Been Gone* feels thin, with the lower frequencies failing to anchor the thrash of the lead guitars. Conversely, the pulsing thump of Akon's *Beautiful* is hard to tolerate at higher volumes.

Positioning the DS8800W makes a large difference to its sound, too. Placed on a carpet, the bass integrates much more effectively. Trouble is, it looks a lot better up on a shelf or table top – and who wants to lay carpet on their table?

A sense of adventure

With Philips having divested its challenging TV business through a joint venture with TPV Technology, the Dutch company can focus on products that are more likely to turn a healthy profit. These undoubtedly include those in its Home Audio division, which runs to nearly 100 products, covering everything from portable DAB radios to the £700 SoundSphere stereo Airplay system. Those with a penchant for Bluetooth are catered for by the Shoqbox series.

Is big always best?

Teufel's offering isn't very portable but it makes up for it with brute strength



Heavy hitter: Teufel's angular dock weighs a hefty 5.7kg

Most AirPlay speakers are easily portable (and in the case of the other four models here all the more frustrating for the lack of a battery-powered option). But the iTeufel Air has a reassuring brute strength about it, and at nearly 6kg it's not the sort of thing you'll want to move regularly around the house or garden. It feels like a lawn mower bucket or recycled tin drum that's been cut in two and sprayed with a gorgeous white lacquer, but is actually made from ABS plastic. And, although it looks like it's precariously positioned on its aluminium stand, it would take some serious determination to unseat it.

There are some hefty electronics at work under the hood, including the power supply, a 100W Class D amplifier, two tweeters, two mid-range drivers and a 50W sub. Connectivity is all take and no give, with just a 3.5mm line-in socket. There's no scope for charging your iPod, iPad or iPhone.

Physical controls are also minimalist, with just on/off and volume control buttons on the top, plus a reset switch and a WPS button (for establishing a network

connection). Visual status information comes in the guise of a coloured LED lurking behind the grille.

There is no remote control and no app available to download from the iTunes store, but the supplied manual is comprehensive and has step-by-step instructions for setting up the speaker using an iDevice, Windows computer or Apple Mac.

The instructions encourage you to create an ad-hoc network by pressing the power button until the LED flashes blue. You then select this network from your MP3 playback device's list of available WLAN networks, launch the iPod and select the speaker from the list of AirPlay devices. Simple enough, but really this is only useful in the unlikely absence of a WLAN network, especially as most users will want to reconnect their iDevice to their home network. To get the speaker established as an AirPlay device on your home network you need to fire up a browser and enter the IP address, which brings up options for reconnecting to your router's signal.

You can use the speaker's line-in socket to listen to other devices as long as there's no AirPlay connection active – streaming takes priority.

The iTeufel Air is another speaker that sounds better when placed on a soft surface. Stereo imaging is more effective than most and there's considerable power to hand. Rainbow's *Since You've Been Gone* has more beef than the other models and the bass is both deep and tight. Whilst Depeche Mode's *Home* is a bit boomy the clarity of the vocals is terrific. The iTeufel Air has to be cranked right up before it distorts and can take a harder drive than most others. That may be enough for you to justify its £400 price tag.

Direct delivery

German brand Teufel burst onto the British AV scene a few years ago, armed with a lineup of brooding THX speaker systems and some of the biggest subwoofers we've ever seen. Its range is more diverse than that, though – including Blu-ray all-in-one systems, media players, PC speakers and now Apple-friendly docks. As a mail-order-only business, there's no chance to 'try before you buy' – but Teufel does offer an 8-week trial period during which you can return a product if you're 'not satisfied for any reason'.

Final standings

Arguably, all AirPlay speakers are overpriced, thanks in part to the hefty fees Apple charges for licensing its unique wireless technology that works with uncompressed files and offers two-way control. An arguably more pressing concern about AirPlay is the flakiness of the system – it relies on a robust interference-free connection. A dropped network connection is impossible to ignore and can ruin a musical moment. If you're not bothered about lossless audio and don't plan on streaming over long ranges, you may want to consider a Bluetooth model – they offer compatibility with non-Apple devices and are typically cheaper.

In terms of performance no one model here particularly stands out as being either streets ahead of the others or miles behind. This makes ranking the speakers more challenging than 10 rounds with David Haye, but it at least means if you're after an AirPlay speaker in the £300-£400 bracket you can base your choice on other factors such as design, price and features, knowing that you're not going to end up with the runt of the pack.

In joint-last place is the Audyssey Audio Dock Air, which is a triumph of power over subtlety and offers the least satisfying user experience. Also equal fourth is the Logitech UE Air Speaker, which lacks refinement but

does improve on the Audyssey's ease of use thanks to its integral docking option and equalization app.

Equal second are the iTeufel Air and Philips Fidelio SoundCurve DS8800W. The Teufel delivers the most powerful and expansive sound but is pricey, heavy and offers little in the way of extras, such as a headphone jack, a separate remote or an app. The Fidelio is compact and neatly styled, with a surprisingly big sound.

The winner, however, is Altec Lansing's InAir 5000, which – given a reliable wireless network – delivers the most satisfying user experience. It's performance is also the most consistently pleasing ●

1ST



HCC VERDICT

Altec Lansing InAir 5000 → £350 approx → www.alteclansing.com

Highs: Browser-free set-up; full dynamic sound; headphone socket
Lows: Bass takes over at higher volumes; prone to network drop-outs

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Connections: USB; 3.5mm aux in; power; Ethernet
Claimed power: 120W
Drivers: 2 x 1in tweeters; 2 x 3in mid-range drivers; 1 x 4in long-throw sub
Dimensions: 483(w) x 170(h) x 171(d)mm
Weight: 3.8kg
Features: USB charging; compatible with iOS 4.2 or later; remote control; InAir app control

2ND



HCC VERDICT

Philips Fidelio SoundCurve DS8800W → £350 Approx → www.philips.co.uk

Highs: Unusual, attractive design; easy to set up; punchy sound
Lows: Inconsistent bass; performs better on soft surfaces

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Connections: USB; 3.5mm aux in; power
Claimed power: 30W
Drivers: 2 x 3in 'full-range' drivers
Dimensions: 455(w) x 165(h) x 150(d)mm
Weight: 2.5kg
Features: USB charging; compatible with iOS 4.3 or later; remote control; SoundStudio app

2ND



HCC VERDICT

Teufel iTeufel Air → £400 Approx → www.teufelaudio.co.uk

Highs: Solidly built; powerful, expansive sound; WPS setup option
Lows: No remote; expensive; no USB charging

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Connections: 3.5mm aux in; power
Claimed power: 100W
Drivers: 2 x 1in tweeters; 2 x 3in mid-range drivers; 1 x 5in woofer
Dimensions: 435(w) x 270(h) x 175(d)mm
Weight: 5.7kg
Features: Compatible with iOS 4.2 or later; integrated DSP; Class D amplifier

4TH



HCC VERDICT

Logitech UE Air Speaker → £300 Approx → www.logitech.com

Highs: Dock makes setup a doddle; powerful sound; equalization app
Lows: No remote control; lacks refinement; flabby volume control

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Connections: Ethernet; 3.5mm aux in; power
Claimed power: NA
Drivers: 2 x woofers; 2 x tweeters/mid-range drivers (size unspecified)
Dimensions: 530(w) x 170(h) x 150(d)mm
Weight: 2.8kg
Features: iOS dock; compatible with iOS 4.2 or later; iTunes app

4TH



HCC VERDICT

Audyssey Audio Dock Air → £300 Approx → www.audyssey.com

Highs: Convenient size and shape; simple set-up; deceptively powerful
Lows: Over emphasis on mid to low end; lacks finesse

Performance: 1 2 3 4 5

Design: 1 2 3 4 5

Features: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

→ Specifications

Connections: USB (for software update only); 3.5mm aux in; power; headphone jack
Claimed power: NA
Drivers: 2 x 0.75in silk-dome tweeters; 2 x 3.5in mid-range drivers; 2 x 4in subwoofers
Dimensions: 120(w) x 210(h) x 226(d)mm
Weight: 2.26kg
Features: Audyssey BassXT processing; compatible with iOS 4.2 or later; iTunes and Apple TV

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TV Stands And Mounts

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The AVo Geek on...
AV RECEIVERS

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£1,700
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Home Cinema Projectors



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1080p Projector

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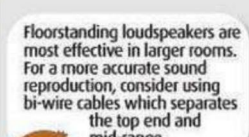
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Floorstanding loudspeakers are most effective in larger rooms. For a more accurate sound reproduction, consider using bi-wire cables which separates the top end and mid-range.



The AVO Geek on...
SPEAKERS

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Original	£3.15
Original Bi-Wire Mark II	£5.00
XT-C	£3.60
Silver Anniversary XT	£4.80
Silver Ann. XT Evolution	£6.00
S. Ann'v XT Bi-Wire	£9.45
Revelation	£13.50
X-Tube 300	£11.25
X-Tube 400	£20.25

Fisual (Priced per metre)	FISUAL
Miniature	40p
Low Profile Ultra-Flat	£1.20
Low Profile Flat Adhesive	£1.45
Covert	£1.50
Covert Ultra Silver Plated	£2.50
Dualcon Bass Enhance	£1.40
Dualcon Bi-Wire	£2.40
Super Pearl 1.5mm	£1.60
Super Pearl 2.5mm	£2.20
S-Flex Studio Grade (2 x 0.75mm)	80p
S-Flex Studio Grade (2 x 1.5mm)	£1.50
S-Flex Studio Grade (2 x 2.5mm)	£1.95
S-Flex Studio Grade (2 x 4mm)	£2.49
Hollywood Dark Twist	£3.95
Havana FX	£4.00

Wireworld (Priced per metre)	WIREWORLD
Horizon 5 Super Flat	£3.22
Stream 16/2 Gauge Install	£5.40

Van Damme (Priced per metre)	VAN DAMME
Studio Grade Blue (1.5mm)	£1.90
Studio Grade Blue (2.5mm)	£2.60
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The best way to get your true hi-fi project off the ground. By purchasing the speakers and stereo amplifier together, we will throw in cables for even further savings! Use the grid below to define your total price and saving!

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	Price	Saving	Price	Saving	Price	Saving
Monitor Audio BX2 Four Finishes	£358.00	£108	£720.00	£67	£489.00	£98
Monitor Audio BX5 Four Finishes	£609.00	£107	£949.00	£87	£719.00	£117
Tannoy Mercury V4 Four Finishes	£418.00	£199	£699.00	£237	£529.00	£207
Q Acoustics 2020i Walnut / Graphite	£294.00	£103	£589.00	£98	£379.00	£108
Q Acoustics 2020i Gloss White / Black	£324.00	£113	£629.00	£108	£429.00	£110
Q Acoustics 2050 Gloss Black	£444.00	£263	£749.00	£277	£525.00	£301
Mission MX1 Black / Walnut / Cherry	£299.00	£67	£599.00	£87	£399.00	£87
Mission MX3 Black / Walnut / Cherry	£479.00	£87	£749.00	£137	£579.00	£107
Wharfedale 10.1 Five Finishes	£299.00	£67	£599.00	£87	£399.00	£87
Wharfedale 10.3 Five Finishes	£359.00	£157	£649.00	£187	£458.00	£178

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Finishing touches

Adrian Justins trawls the shelves for those must-have home cinema extras

EDIFIER SPINNAKER SPEAKERS

£330 approx

Here's one speaker setup that you'd struggle to fix under a wall-hanging TV. Each visually arresting Spinnaker measures 15in tall and has a fully active, tri-amped system with a total 90W power output. Although a power source is needed, Bluetooth wireless connectivity is included to provide wireless amplification and output of sounds from devices such as tablets and smartphones. Optical and 3.5mm aux inputs provide compatibility with TVs and AVRs, whilst an external sub can also be hooked up.

Each satellite features a 0.75in silk-domed front-facing tweeter, a 2.75in mid-range driver and a downward-firing 4in 25W bass driver. A multi-functional dome-shaped remote control provides navigation, play/mute and volume adjustment. Edifier's speakers are available from the Apple Online Store, Currys and Comet.

www.edifier-international.com/

HCC VERDICT
Nautical but nice



SANUS TVMA202 SOUNDBAR SPEAKER MOUNT

£65 approx

Hanging a flatscreen saves space in a cramped room, but what do you do with the rest of your kit? Well, if you're using a soundbar to beef up your TV's sonics, this Soundbar Speaker Mount could be the answer.

Designed to attach to Sanus's current range of VisionMount TV wall mounts, its robust construction allows the positioning of either a soundbar or a centre channel speaker (upto 16kg) directly beneath the screen. Height and level adjustments allow vertical and horizontal correction.

www.sanus.com/eu/en

HCC VERDICT
A sound idea



SILVERLIT BLUETOOTH FERRARI ENZO

£80 approx

This smart-controlled Bluetooth Enzo Ferrari is an ideal gadget for petrolheads, letting you turn your home cinema into a miniature race track.

Made by Silverlit, with official approval from Ferrari, this 1:16th scale model can be steered via an interactive dashboard from an iPhone or other iOS device,

with features including a collision sensor and vibration when you're completing 'extreme manoeuvres.'

Other neat features of the Bluetooth Enzo Ferrari include working headlamps, indicators and brake and hazard lights – so you can alert your cat to its presence. The range is rated

at 10m, and battery life extends to half an hour from a quartet of AA batteries. Pick one up at the Science Museum shop.

www.sciencemuseumshop.co.uk

HCC VERDICT
Time to re-enact Fast and Furious!

TIVOLI AUDIO RADIOSILENZ

£120 approx

With a reputation as a maker of high-quality portable radios, Boston-based Tivoli Audio has understandably decided to enter the bustling headphone arena, where more cans are sold in the UK than cakes – hot, cold or anywhere in between. The company's first offering, dubbed Radiosilenz, is a set of active noise-cancellers.

Their claim to fame is that these are the world's first active noise-cancelling headphones with wooden housings instead

of plastic. Available in walnut, cherry and black ash, the use of low-resonance wood is supposed to deliver superior acoustics from the 2in drivers. Operating for 50 hours from a single AAA battery, they can be used with the noise cancellation on or off, or without

a battery. A Defeat button temporarily switches off the noise cancellation and fades down the audio, allowing conversation or announcements to be heard easily. They're also supplied with a travel pouch.

www.tivoliaudio.com

HCC VERDICT
Yet another set to audition!

Clips...

Small items that could make a big difference to your system

C2G HDMI Cable



£10 approx
This cable's proper name is almost as long as the thing

itself: 2m Velocity High-Speed HDMI Cable with Rotating (Swivel) Connectors. Very handy for those times when you have an awkward HDMI socket on your hands. Other products in the C2G (formerly Cables To Go) range include a 20m HDMI Active Optical Cable (AOC) for long runs.
www.c2g.com/uk

Cygnett Platform iPad Stand



£30 approx
Got a tablet? It's only a matter of time. And

you'll soon be considering a stand, such as this one from Down Under. Rubber-covered brackets and a non-slip rubber cradle hold your tablet securely, while the rubber-slip mat at the base guarantees a firm grip on most surfaces. Unless, perhaps, you live in an igloo.
uk.cygnett.com

Russ Andrews PowerLink Plus



£75 approx
Wider-spaced sockets, low mains

impedance and no switches or neon lights – that's why Russ Andrews thinks this extender socket is worth splashing out for, claiming a superior audio performance compared with bog-standard designs.
www.russandrews.com

One For All SV9335



£30 approx
Anyone within 12 miles of their TV transmitter

should be guaranteed a decent Freeview HD picture from One For All's latest indoor aerial, thanks to its use of patch technology, built-in amplification and four-stage filtering. Handy for the bedroom or kitchen.
www.oneforall.com

HOME CINEMA

Choice

→ In the next issue

10 Ways to Pimp Your System! Lighting, automation, seating and more
Ultimate Movie Punch-ups We crown cinema's most audacious fight scenes
JBL Synthesis Astonishing audio that'll take your breath away

→ On test

SONY NS7-GS7 Google TV is here! **DENON AVR-3313** Seven-channel AVR **ROUNDUP** Wireless HDMI senders put to the test **PLUS** In-depth news, Blu-ray reviews and more

ISSUE
#213 ON SALE
Sept 20

THE TOP 20

Choosing a home cinema system is a potential minefield that must be negotiated with great care or safely avoided by letting experts guide you. If you want to end up with a system that, as a minimum, meets your expectations in terms of picture and sound quality, reading magazine product reviews and choosing the recommendations, five-star favourites or best buys can only ever be part of the answer at best. Looking for the cheapest price and having a system delivered to your door, even with a 'knowledgeable' friend to help set it up, is a well-trodden path to disappointment.

There is a bewildering choice of components on the market today and also different ways in which components can be installed and connected together. Which sort of visual system do you go for? Projector and screen, or plasma, LCD or LED TV? 3D or non-3D? Full 1080p capability is now the only sensible choice but the appropriate source components, such as a Blu-ray player, need to be part of the equation. The sound performance of a system is also hugely important, even more so if you will be listening to music, or music DVD's, through the same system. If so, you need an amp that approaches the performance of a decent 2-channel hi-fi amp, which is not that easy to find. Having an amp with the right inputs for the best connectivity is essential but you will also need to decide on a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker system, passive or active sub and, crucially, where they will be sited for the best results. In short, it's complicated and very fertile ground for getting it wrong.

ACHIEVING POTENTIAL

To select a system, you could choose a collection of 'Best Buy' components in the hope that they will be a great combination. Maybe, but probably not. You could buy a pre-packaged all-in-one system from one manufacturer. This is almost certainly not the best route either as you will miss out on enormous potential. From informal surveys conducted, it appears highly likely that the majority of home cinema systems selected and installed on a DIY basis (that is without professional input) are performing at way below their optimum level. To compound matters, most are also ill-matched to the room in which they are installed and are, in reality, the wrong system. Without considerable knowledge or experience, high quality home cinema is not a suitable DIY activity. Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience. It must be exciting, reliable and deliver true value for money.

WHAT AND WHERE TO BUY

To ensure a home cinema system is right for you, where do you start? Here's an important tip ...**don't** start with **WHAT**, start with **WHERE**. There's only one way to give yourself the best chance of getting it right first time, and that's through a specialist AV dealer. It's possible you have preconceived ideas that put you off visiting one. Although you would welcome the advice and guidance, you don't know the technical jargon. You don't want to be talked down to. Your friend has said they only sell expensive gear and they're not interested if you don't have a big budget. They're expensive. These are just myths.

Most specialist AV dealers are running their business because, above all, home cinema is their hobby. They spend a large portion of their time comparing systems to get the best possible results. They know the component combinations which don't gel together and, conversely, they know the combinations which give the best performance within a given price range. Very importantly, they know how to get a system working to its optimum. But they all also know the system must suit **you**.



“...Our aim must be to buy a home cinema system that will provide an excellent picture quality plus an audio delivery that will match, or even better, the commercial cinema experience.”

So good you'll believe you're there!

GUIDE

TO BUYING HOME A CINEMA SYSTEM



BUYING OR BEING SOLD TO?

There are dealers around, web based or otherwise, who will sell you anything you are willing to pay for. They may be a bit cheaper but that's all they offer. Now there's a carefully selected group of long-established specialist dealers who are totally committed to putting the customer first. Their idea of 'selling' is to discuss your requirements, offer their advice, give you the best options, then play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge. You'll probably be surprised and, almost certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to see and hear the differences between components and between systems. You'll be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand in your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it performs to its best, and ensure you're entirely happy with the way it works. Why? Because a high proportion of these dealers' custom comes through people who have bought from them before, either directly or by recommendation. It's vital to them to get it right for you.

GETTING THE BEST DEAL

Unless you've got money to burn, you'll be living with your new system for years. Most of these dealers offer much longer equipment guarantees than provided by the manufacturer, a very worthwhile benefit, but it also makes it in the dealer's interest to ensure high build quality and reliability. Maybe you could save a few pounds by buying piecemeal but you'll lose out on the overall package. As far as the dealers are concerned, they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a far better way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

LISTED BELOW ARE 20 OF THE BEST AV SHOPS IN THE COUNTRY

They have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards home cinema systems that will provide years of superlative performance and total satisfaction.

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Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

216 Moulsham Street. 01245 265245
www.rayleighhifi.com

Kingston-upon-Thames INFIDELITY

9 High Street, Hampton Wick.
020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead AUDIO VENUE

36 Queen Street. 01628 633995
www.audiovenue.com

Norwich MARTINS HI-FI

85-91 Ber Street. 01603 627134
www.martinshifi.co.uk

Rayleigh, Essex RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

44a High Street. 01268 779762
Custom Install Dept.
01268 776932
www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

132/4 London Road. 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

Tunbridge Wells KENT HOME CINEMA

69 London Road, Southborough.
01892 535007
www.kenthomecinema.co.uk

LONDON

Ealing AUDIO VENUE

27 Bond Street. 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI

190a New North Road. 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS

61-63 Webbs Road, Battersea.
020 7924 2040
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

SW20 O'BRIEN HI-FI

60 Durham Road.
020 8946 1528
www.obrienhifi.com

MIDLANDS

Coventry FRANK HARVEY HI-FI EXCELLENCE

163 Spon Street. 024 7652 5200
www.frankharvey.co.uk

Nottingham CASTLE SOUND & VISION

48/50 Maid Marian Way. 0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.com

Solihull MUSIC MATTERS

93-95 Hobs Moat Road. 0121 742 0254
www.musicmatters.co.uk

NORTH

York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate. 01904 627108
www.soundorg.co.uk



The majority of the above dealers are members of one or both of the major trade organisations, BADA or CEDIA.

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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PLAYBACK

→ **Anton van Beek reviews** **JAWS** The ultimate blockbuster hits Blu-ray
THE HUNGER GAMES The kids aren't all right **HEADHUNTERS** Scandinavian crime story delivers
 big thrills in HD **SINGIN' IN THE RAIN** Warner works its restoration magic on the classic musical
GHOST STORIES Vintage TV spook-fests scares up a storm on DVD **AND MUCH MORE!**

Shiver me timbers!

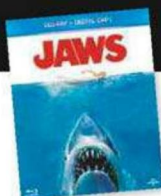
The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists
 Sony Pictures → All-region BD

Is Aardman Animation's latest stop-motion flick worth your hard-earned pieces of eight? Find out in our Blu-ray review on p125

HCC Ratings key

Megalodon	1 2 3 4 5
Great White	1 2 3 4 5
Hammerhead	1 2 3 4 5
Megamouth	1 2 3 4 5
Wobblegong	1 2 3 4 5





Just when you thought it
was safe to go back in
your home cinema...

'Smile you son of a bitch'

Spielberg's classic blockbuster gets a Blu-ray upgrade that's sure to keep fans happy

→ Jaws

Every bit as efficient and effective as its killer shark, Steven Spielberg's 1975 smash is not just a fantastic horror film, it's also as close as you'll ever come to finding the perfect Hollywood blockbuster. Every single element is perfectly balanced, be it suspense, horror, levity, character development or good old-fashioned storytelling. It's nothing less than a milestone in the history of cinema and a bloody great film to boot.

Picture: Universal's restoration team has been occasionally criticised for a heavy-handed use of digital tools that frequently results in a loss of fine detail and film grain. Well, you can forget all about that when it comes to the *Jaws* Blu-ray.

Signed-off by Spielberg himself, the AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode is beautiful. Colour timing is impeccably balanced, contrast has been improved significantly and the increase in clarity compared to previous releases is simply mind-boggling. You've never seen the shark look this fake...

Audio: Whenever you think about *Jaws* the first thing that often comes to mind is John Williams' score. The film's entire soundscape is such a huge part of its success that I'll admit to being a little wary when I found out that it has been remixed in 7.1 for this Blu-ray release. I shouldn't have been.

The DTS-HD MA 7.1 track is a thing of real beauty. There's nothing overtly flashy on show, instead it's a subtle piece of re-engineering that expands the soundfield while lending even greater



clarity to all of the elements. To my ears, it's easily the best the film has ever sounded. And if you don't agree, a DTS 2.0 version of the original mono soundtrack is also included.

Extras: The majority of extras here will be familiar to fans, as they've been recycled from previous LaserDiscs and DVDs. This includes the 123 minute *The Making of Jaws* documentary, 14 minutes of deleted scenes/outtakes, 9 minutes of on-set footage, four galleries (*Storyboards*, *Production Photos*, *Marketing Jaws* and *Jaws Phenomenon*) and the theatrical trailer.

New to the Blu-ray is an 8-minute featurette about the film's restoration and (best of all) a second documentary entitled *The Shark is Still Working*. Running to 101 minutes, the latter started life as a fan project, before netting fresh interviews with almost all of the key players in the film's production, as well as other well-known Hollywood names, to discuss the impact *Jaws* had at the time of its release and its legacy.

All of which would be impossible to fault – if it wasn't for the fact that the actual presentation was so sub-standard. Not only is everything on the disc bar the restoration featurette presented in standard-definition, but the new documentary, hasn't even been anamorphically encoded. And don't even get me started on how blurry the galleries look (all of the imagery really needs to be re-scanned). It ultimately smacks of laziness on the part of Universal and is the only blemish on an otherwise fantastic Blu-ray release.

HCC VERDICT

Jaws → Universal Pictures
All-region BD → £25 Approx

We say: A stunning presentation of Spielberg's classic – if only as much effort had been put into how the extras look

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

Project X: Extended Cut

Warner Home Video → All-region
BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx



It's hard to believe that this film comes from the same writer as the sublime *27 Jump Street*. Vile,

witless and utterly repellent in its attitude towards women, this tale of an out-of-control house party is one of the most pathetic excuses for a film we've seen in some time. This Blu-ray release includes both Theatrical and Extended cuts with AVC 1.78:1 1080p visuals that do a fine job with the handcam source material. The AV highlight is the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio, which features excellent separation and fluid movement around the speakers.

1 2 3 4 5

Contraband

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£25 Approx



When the only thing notable about a film is the contrived storytelling you know there's a problem.

But such is the fate of this lacklustre crime thriller built around yet another one-note performance from leading man Mark Wahlberg. Not that this has stopped Universal from putting plenty of effort into the Blu-ray release. While the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix favours atmospheric over high-impact dynamics, the high-contrast AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode impresses with its detailing and deep blacks. Decent extras include a picture-in-picture mode, *Making of...* and a chat-track.

1 2 3 4 5

The Raven

Universal Pictures → All-region BD
£25 Approx



The poetic terror of Edgar Allan Poe's fiction is sadly lacking from this daft period thriller that pits the author against a killer inspired by Poe's writing. Any small spark of interest generated by the 'What if?' concept is quickly extinguished by the appalling script and John Cusack's unconvincing portrayal of the Gothic novelist.

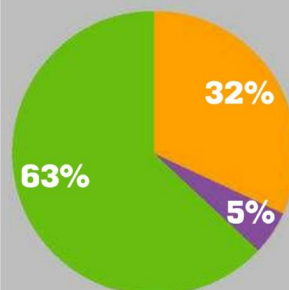
The Raven's dark and gloomy cinematography is ably handled by this Blu-ray's pin-sharp AVC 2.40:1 1080p transfer and is aided by an atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. A dull commentary, plus some deleted and extended scenes, are the disc's only bonus features.

1 2 3 4 5

We asked...

Which of the following was the Summer's best superhero blockbuster?

- Avengers Assemble
- The Amazing Spider-Man
- The Dark Knight Rises



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action



Nesbrø's most dangerous game

Scandinavian tale of cat-and-mouse delivers plenty of Hollywood-sized thrills

→ Headhunters

Norwegian author Jo Nesbrø is best known for his crime novels featuring detective Harry Hole. But while we wait for that character to make the jump to the bigscreen, fans (and everybody else) would do well to check out this gripping and surprisingly witty action-thriller adapted from one of his stand-alone novels.

Aksel Hennie stars as Roger Brown, a successful headhunter who leads a secret life as an art thief. The trouble starts when his latest acquisition turns out to be owned by a former mercenary, who is soon hot on Roger's trail and looking to kill him.

Picture: In the accompanying featurette on the disc, cinematographer John Andreas Andersen outlines how the filmmakers hoped to make *Headhunters* look like a glossy Hollywood action thriller, albeit done on a much smaller budget.

Well, this Blu-ray's attractively cinematic AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode leaves you in no doubt that they succeeded. There's a richness and solidity to the visuals, aided by plenty of fine detailing and excellent black level depth. Like *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* before it, colours veer towards a cooler, more subdued palette, but it's clearly an aesthetic decision rather than a problem with the film's hi-def transfer.

Audio: The filmmakers may have succeeded in cooking up a thriller that is stylistically on par with its Hollywood peers, but you'd be hard-pushed to say that the same is true of the film's soundtrack. *Headhunters'* DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundscape proves to be a pretty low-key affair at all times. While this doesn't really impact on the dialogue that drives the movie, there isn't any great sense of

dynamism. Take the car crash in Chapter 8 as an example – putting the rumble of the truck's engine in the rears in the build up to the crash works well at crafting tension, but the crash itself is a bit of a damp squib and there's simply no 'oomph' to the resulting impact.

It's worth noting that the above applies to the film's original Norwegian-language track. The disc also features a DTS-HD MA 5.1 English-language dub, but I'm sorry to say that I only could only manage about 10 minutes of that abomination. Suffice to say, much of the dubbed dialogue sounds like it's being spoken by people in recording booths, so I can't imagine the audio engineers will have added any additional dynamics to the rest of the mix.

Extras: This Blu-ray scrapes by with the bare minimum of bonus features. In addition to the trailer, there's a solid 23-min *Making of...* documentary, featuring interviews with the key cast, director, cinematographer and producers.



HCC VERDICT

Headhunters → Momentum
Pictures → Region B BD
£25 Approx

We say: It would be a crime not to hunt down this superior thriller in high-definition

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Ted could never remember which pedal was the brake



Backstage security at *The X Factor* had become ridiculous



Appetite for destruction

Has Hollywood bitten off more than it can chew with this new teen publishing sensation?



→ The Hunger Games

The Hunger Games may be based on the latest 'young adult' publishing sensation, but don't go expecting another *Twilight*. Instead, get ready for a smart sci-fi satire with traces of *Battle Royale* about it, where youngsters are pitted against one another in a fight to the death in a near-future America. As an added bonus it's presented here on in its uncut 143-minute form, rather than the censored version that played at UK cinemas.

Picture: Whether it's rendering brightly-coloured crowds lining city streets or the lush greens of the forests where the games take place, this AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode delivers the goods.

Colour saturation is superb, brightness levels are spot-on and there's plenty of fine detail in facial close-ups. And while the film's constantly moving vérité-style cinematography does rob it of some of the crispness and clarity you might expect from a modern production, it lends the imagery a gritty and natural style that the BD replicates brilliantly.

Audio: Lionsgate's Blu-ray offers two audio options – a native DTS-HD MA 7.1 mix and a Dolby Digital 2.0 track 'optimized for late-night listening.'

The lossless track is particularly impressive, smartly balancing the various elements it contains. Voices are clean and distinguished, the score is rich and melodious and the spatial

imaging and movement around the seven-channel soundfield is precise (as evidenced by the encounter with a swarm of 'tracker jacker' wasps in Chapter 11). As for the stereo track – who cares?

Extras: The major bonus feature here is the eight-part *The World is Watching: Making The Hunger Games*, an epic two-hour documentary that negates the need for a commentary track as it takes you through practically every step of the film's production.

The second disc also houses a collection of supplementary featurettes. *Game Maker: Suzanne Collins & The Hunger Games Phenomenon* investigates the book, its author and the themes it explores; *Letters from the Rose Garden* focuses on the casting of Donald Sutherland, with particular attention to a letter he wrote to director Gary Ross exploring the psychology of his character; *Controlling the Games* is a brief piece about the creation of the Game Centre location for the film; and *Preparing for the Games: A Director's Process* gives Ross a chance to talk about how he transforms a script into a shot-list before launching into a split-screen breakdown of a sequence from the film.

Also included are an interview with the director, the full version of an in-movie propaganda film and poster/photo galleries.

HCC VERDICT

The Hunger Games: The Unseen Version → Lionsgate Region B BD → £25 Approx

We say: Impressive AV and great extras will leave you hungry for future instalments in hi-def

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Oh what a glorious feeling

Warner's sensational new 4K restoration will leave you dancing with joy

→ Singin' in the Rain



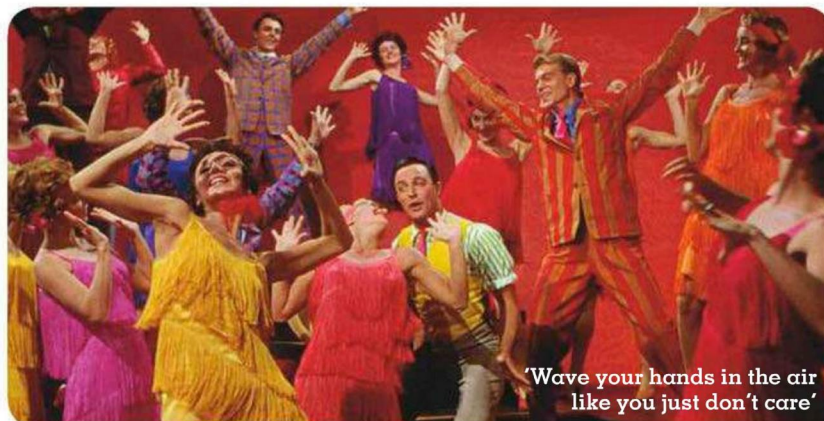
Originally conceived by producer Arthur Freed as a way of re-using MGM's existing catalogue of songs, *Singin' in the Rain* still stands as probably the best Hollywood musical ever. Also deeply funny, and packed with insight into the movie industry in general (it tackles the subject of the transition from silent films to talkies with far more flair than *The Artist*), it demands a space in your disc your collection

Picture: Warner Bros. has achieved a near miracle with this 4K restoration, although this fact might be lost on people expecting something as visually spectacular as its work on titles like *Ben-Hur*.

The problem with *Singin' in the Rain* was always the loss of the original negatives, which were destroyed in a fire in the late 1970s. Because of this, the restoration team has had to work from a variety of elements for this latest incarnation, some several generations away from the original negatives. Couple this with the inherent soft look of the film and the mis-registration issues typical of three-strip Technicolor film and you have a recipe for disaster.

And yet, there's a remarkable visual continuity throughout this AVC 1.33:1 1080p encode that you might not be expecting. Colours are particularly striking and there's not a trace of print damage to be seen. Given what Warner's boffins had to work with, it's impossible to think *Singin' in the Rain* will ever look any better than this.

Audio: While it's a shame there's no sign of the original audio mix in either 'lossy' or 'lossless'



form, there's nothing wrong with the DTS-HD MA 5.1 remix. Extremely respectful to the original elements, this multichannel presentation makes subtle use of the surround channels to envelope you in the musical numbers, while prioritising the sensational musicality and vocalisations across the front soundstage. Okay, there's not much in the way of thumping LFE, but otherwise this is foot-tapping' fun.

Extras: Sadly, this single-disc Blu-ray release isn't the all-singing, all-dancing spectacular fans might expect when it comes to bonus goodies.

The only extras salvaged from the old Two-Disc Special Edition DVD are the audio commentary and trailer. These are joined by a programmable Jukebox feature linking to the songs in the film and a new 51-min retrospective documentary entitled *Singin' in the Rain: Raining on a New Generation* that explores the film's impact on today's musicians, choreographers and directors.

HCC VERDICT

Singin' in the Rain → Warner Home Video → All-region BD (US Import) → £17 Approx

We say: Ignore the meagre extras and savour the great restoration

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Truth or Dare

Showbox Home Entertainment
All-region BD → £17 Approx



One of the better British horrors I've encountered for a while, this slick and effective chiller finds four friends being subjected to a deadly game of truth or dare by a killer seeking revenge for the death of his brother.

While the Blu-ray is a little short on extras (just a 16-minute *Making of...* featurette and the trailer), it goes some way to making up for this with a showy AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode that excels at delivering deep shadows and fine detailing. Although it seems a little under-powered during the initial party scenes, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix offers some effective atmospherics later on.

1 2 3 4 5

Starship Troopers: Invasion

Sony Pictures → All-region BD
£25 Approx



It may lack the satirical bite of Paul Verhoeven's 1997 sci-fi blockbuster, but this animated sequel is a notable step up in quality from the dire live-action sequels we've had to endure over the years.

Unsurprisingly, the CG-animated feature looks sensational in hi-def, with the Blu-ray's gritty AVC 1.78:1 1080p visuals boasting impressive depth and textures. Even better is the DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio, which bristles with dynamics and power. A chat track and 80-minute *Making of...* doc head up a solid batch of extras.

1 2 3 4 5

Hit & Miss

Fremantle Home Entertainment
All-region BD → £25 Approx



Transgressive sex, gory violence and domestic drama clash head-on in this gripping homegrown drama produced for Sky Atlantic. Chloë Sevigny stars as Mia, a pre-op transsexual contract killer whose life is turned upside down when she discovers she's the father of an 11-year-old boy!

The Blu-ray splits the six episodes equally across two platters, giving the gloomy AVC 1.78:1 1080i visuals and evocative DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack plenty of space to breathe. A 25-minute Q&A and a 79-minute reel of interviews make for informative – if occasionally repetitive – extra features.

1 2 3 4 5

Blade 2

Warner Home Video → All-region BD (US Import) → £17 Approx



Now celebrating its tenth anniversary, Guillermo's Del Toro's sequel improves significantly on its predecessor and still stands as one of the best comic book movies around.

It also makes for a kick-ass Blu-ray experience. Despite the presence of edge halos and the inherently crushed blacks, *Blade II*'s AVC 1.78:1 1080p encodes looks suitably stylish. Even better though are the 5.1 and 7.1 DTS-HD MA mixes, which are potent enough to raise the dead. The disc also crams in so many extras that it'd come as no surprise to find a kitchen sink in there with 'em.

1 2 3 4 5

Arcade action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. Check out these two videogames vying for time on your home cinema system...

The Amazing Spider-Man

Activision → Xbox 360/PS3/Wii/PC → £50 Approx



You may not be able to watch Sony Pictures' new *Spider-Man* reboot on your home setup until later this year, but in the meantime you can always try your hand at swinging through the streets of Manhattan yourself thanks to this videogame.

Released to coincide with said cinematic outing, *The Amazing Spider-Man* takes place after the film ends, allowing it free rein when it comes to narrative (as well as the ability to rope in plenty of supporting comic book characters who didn't appear in the movie). Cue plenty of arachnoid acrobatics in an open-world recreation of New York, and beating up thugs using a combat system 'inspired' by *Batman: Arkham Asylum*.

Activision's game looks and sounds absolutely spectacular. The graphics are crisp, ultra-fast and bursting with colour, while the dynamic audio effects maintain the illusion that you're taking part in your very own Hollywood blockbuster. So what more could you ask for? Well, better gameplay wouldn't go amiss. While this latest *Spider-Man* game is a lot of fun, the pared down simplicity of the web-swinging (no match for the old *Spider-Man 2* game), uninspired level design and occasionally dodgy camera system means that it's really more 'Acceptable' than 'Amazing'. Hardly an essential purchase.

1 2 3 4 5

Brave

Disney Interactive → Xbox 360/PS3/Wii → £45 Approx



Ironically for a game entitled *Brave*, this licensed tie-in to the latest Pixar film plays it incredibly safe. Some might argue that it doesn't need to be particularly imaginative as it's aimed at a family audience, but the same thing could also be said for Disney's enjoyable



Toy Story 3 or *Cars 2* games. And what about Traveller's Tales' Lego series, which is phenomenally popular with players of all ages?

Brave casts players as feisty teenage princess Merida, who must battle through a series

of levels to save her mother from a curse that transformed her into a bear. Naturally, this is achieved by hacking and slashing your way through magical beasts and solving rudimentary puzzles.

It's a fairly inoffensive combination of elements, but one that is hamstrung by surprisingly shoddy graphics. You'd expect jaw-dropping visuals to be the saving grace of any game based on a Pixar movie, but instead you're served a combination of unrefined character models, muddy textures and drab colours that frequently conspires to make it difficult to make out what's happening (even on a 50in TV...). The two-player mode is subsequently almost unplayable. Extremely disappointing.

1 2 3 4 5

Boardwalk Empire: Season Two

HBO Home Entertainment → All-region BD → £45 Approx



Like a prohibition-era version of its HBO stablemate *Game of Thrones*, this second series of the period crime series becomes engulfed in the stormy world of political manoeuvring and shaky allegiances as various parties vie for control of Atlantic City. It's gripping, brutal storytelling that pulls no punches and cements the show's

position as an all-time great. As with ...*Season One*, the AVC 1.78:1 1080p transfers and DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtracks are exemplary. Quality extras include featurettes, commentaries and a picture-in-picture mode for the pivotal eleventh episode.

1 2 3 4 5

Wallander: Series Three

BBC Worldwide → All-region BD → £30 Approx



The UK obsession with Scandinavian crime fiction continues apace with this third trio of 90-minute English-language adaptations of Henning Mankell's Kurt Wallander novels. As before, it's grim and gloomy stuff, with Kenneth Branagh giving a typically assured performance as the morose detective. But at the same time,

it's one of the most visually striking British TV shows around – so it's a real shame that the otherwise gorgeous AVC 1.78:1 1080i Blu-ray encodes suffer from obvious edge enhancement issues. Disappointingly, the two-disc set is also devoid of extras.

1 2 3 4 5

Cinderella: Diamond Edition

Walt Disney → All-region BD/R2 DVD → £25 Approx



Disney has worked its magic once again and transformed another of its animated classics into a spectacular Diamond Edition package. So, even if *Cinderella* is far from the studio's most accomplished fairy tale adaptation, this new hi-def release is a must for animation fans and Disney collectors alike. The pristine AVC 1.33:1

1080p encode excels at showcasing the beautifully restored visuals, while both DTS-HD MA mixes (1.0 and 7.1) sound sublime. Most of the key DVD extras are present, plus three new featurettes, an alternate opening and a new *Tangled* short.

1 2 3 4 5

101 Dalmatians

Walt Disney → All-region BD → £25 Approx



We're not privy to how Disney goes about choosing which of its back catalogue 'toons gets the Diamond Edition treatment on Blu-ray, so why *101 Dalmatians* didn't make the grade is anyone's guess. Still, even if this disc is not quite best in BD breed, it's no mongrel either. While the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is

restrained, the restored AVC 1.33:1 1080p imagery impresses even when projected at epic proportions. Extras (culled from the Platinum Edition DVD) include a 34-minute *Making of...* and countless trailers and TV/radio spots.

1 2 3 4 5



The Pirates always enjoyed the theme nights at their local Wetherspoons



Blu-ray buccaneers!

Aardman indulges in a spot of film piracy that we can all get behind

→ The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists

Stop-motion specialist Aardman Animations has struggled to find a level of cinematic success to match what it regularly achieves on TV. In part this is down to some ill-judged forays into computer animation that have struggled to live up to the lofty heights of Pixar.

Thankfully, this latest feature sees the studio at its very best, finding the perfect match for its trademark Anglo-centric humour and quirky stop-motion animation in the world of Gideon Dafoe's popular *The Pirates!* series of children's books. Bursting with *Python*-esque gags and zany action, it's a treat on a par with any of the *Wallace & Gromit* shorts. Buy it for the kids, but watch it yourself.

Picture: This single-disc Blu-ray can be viewed in either 2D or 3D modes, both of which are a treat for your display.

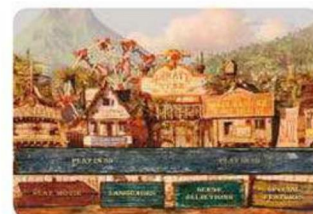
One of the strengths of stop-motion animation has always been the visual depth of the image and the physicality of the characters, something that comes across even more readily via the MVC 2.40:1 1080p stereoscopic encode. Whether the 3D technology is being used for a cheap gag like the 'googly-eyed' pirate

flag in Chapter 3, or to immerse you in rollercoaster-style thrills during the bath chase in Chapter 6, you'll be awed by the magnificent colour saturation, contrast levels and image stability on display. More proof that 'toons really are the driving force behind the 3D revolution – and this peerless technical quality naturally extends to the disc's 2D presentation, which is so colourful and detailed that it'll shiver ya timbers.

Audio: Sony's HD platter features a reference-quality DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack bursting with verve and life. Sound editor Antony Bayman takes great pains to deliver a fun and busy three-dimensional soundscape at all times – movement across the speakers is natural and effortless and there's impressive heft to some of the more meaty effects. Dialogue (provided by a Brit-heavy cast including Hugh Grant, Brian Blessed and Imelda Staunton) is full-bodied and accurately captures the regional accents on offer.

Extras: Director Peter Lord sits down with co-director Jeff Newitt and editor Justin Krish for a gratifying audio commentary that highlights the amount of effort that went into

The Pirates!... production and points out some of the background gags you might have missed. You also get the *From Stop to Motion* and *Creating the Bath Chase Sequence* featurettes, and a set-top game. >



HCC VERDICT

The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists in 3D → Sony Pictures → All-region BD £27 Approx

We say: This BD is packed with AV treasures

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5

I Am Bruce Lee

Fremantle Home Entertainment
All-region BD → £25 Approx



The world isn't exactly short of documentaries about the life and career of Bruce Lee. Indeed, by now they probably outnumber films Lee actually made by a ratio of 20:1. So, despite an interesting focus on his influence on Mixed Martial Arts, plenty of input from Linda Lee Cadwell and Shannon Lee amongst the many talking heads and some rare clips, there's not that much in this officially-sanctioned doc that fans won't have seen or heard before. At least the AVC 1.78:1 hi-def visuals and DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio both deliver the goods. Extras include more interviews and home movie footage.

1 2 3 4 5

Rumble Fish

Eureka – The Masters of Cinema
Series → All-region BD → £23 Approx



The technical quality of the Masters of Cinema Blu-ray collection has barely faltered over its three-year history – which is why it pains us to say that this AVC 1.85:1 1080p presentation of Francis Ford Coppola's 1983 cult movie doesn't hold up to the high standard we've come to expect from Eureka. It's no disaster, but clearly suffers from a surfeit of digital manipulation. Much more agreeable is the chance to finally hear Stewart Copeland's score in a lossless form (both stereo and 5.1 DTS-HD Master Audio mixes are included). The disc also includes plenty of extras.

1 2 3 4 5

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie

StudioCanal UK → Region B BD
£25 Approx



Luis Buñuel's award-winning surrealist classic – about a party of upper-class friends repeatedly trying and failing to dine together – celebrates its 40th anniversary with a new HD release. The biggest drawbacks are the technical limitations of the film itself, with the DTS-HD MA 2.0 mono soundtrack obviously suffering from poor dynamics and inherent sync issues. The AVC 1.66:1 1080p visuals fare better, but sharpness and detail fluctuates throughout. Extras are limited to a trailer and 35-minute feature.

1 2 3 4 5

The Night Porter

Anchor Bay → Region BD
£16 Approx



Thirteen years on from World War II, concentration camp survivor (Charlotte Rampling) rekindles a sexual relationship with a former Nazi SS officer (Dirk Bogarde) in this troubling film that trawls the darkest corners of the human psyche. Sadly, Anchor Bay has missed the opportunity to further probe the film's themes by including nothing in the way extras. Rather more satisfying is the quality of the AVC 1.85:1 1080p encode, which copes well with the low-light visuals, and solid LPCM 2.0 audio. A fairly redundant DTS-HD MA 5.1 remix is also included.

1 2 3 4 5

British television's haunted heartland

Shocks and scares abound in these two new collections of vintage BBC tales of terror



→ Ghost Stories: Volumes 1 & 2

Once upon a time the BBC used to delight in terrifying Christmas audiences with adaptations of classic ghost stories – several based on the work of M.R. James. These two volumes celebrate this with four James adaptations. The first houses 1968 and 2010 takes on *Whistle and I'll Come to You*, while the second offers up 1971's *The Stalls of Barchester* and 1972's *A Warning to the Curious* – each a tour de force in small-screen supernatural scares.

Picture: As you'd expect from BBC TV dramas from the late '60s/early '70s, the original version of *Whistle and I'll Come to You*, plus *The Stalls of Barchester* and *A Warning to the Curious*, were all shot on 16mm and framed at 1.33:1. The first is the only black-and-white production, and certainly fares worst in terms of print damage, especially during the nightmare chase across the beach. Indeed, all three could really do with a thorough restoration, but I doubt that will ever happen, given the cost involved.

The second (more recent) adaptation of *Whistle and I'll Come to You* is a considerable step-up in quality, offering a pristine and chillingly evocative anamorphic 2.40:1 transfer.

Audio: All four stories feature Dolby Digital 2.0 soundtracks. The dual-mono presentations of the three older adaptations are definitely in better condition than the accompanying visuals, with clear dialogue and no obvious damage.

The 2010 adaptation of *Whistle and I'll Come to You* understandably improves on this with a genuine two-channel mix. However, despite



Time Team was a lot more dangerous back in the '60s

HCC VERDICT

Ghost Stories: Classic Adaptations from the BBC – Volumes 1 & 2 → BFI Video R2 DVD → £20 Each

We say: A delight for horror fans

Picture: 1 2 3 4 5

Sound: 1 2 3 4 5

Extras: 1 2 3 4 5

Movie: 1 2 3 4 5

Overall: 1 2 3 4 5



Play All Select Film Extras

feeling rather more natural and nuanced than the other titles' mono soundtracks, there's still little in the way of steering across the stereo spread.

Extras: The extras on the first volume include an intro to the 1968 adaptation of *Whistle...* by horror novelist Ramsey Campbell; brief interviews with director Jonathan Miller and historian Christopher Frayling; an audio-only reading of MR James' *Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad*; and Campbell reading his own tribute to James, *The Guide*.

As well as intros to both tales by director Lawrence Gordon Clark, the second volume also includes further adaptations of the stories from a subsequent attempt by the BBC to reignite the strand for Christmas 2000. The two half-hour episodes feature Christopher Lee as James reading the *The Stalls of Barchester* and *A Warning to the Curious* to a rapt audience – imagine a grown-up version of *Jackanory* and you've got the general idea.

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POINT OF VIEW

Richard Stevenson is hoping AV receiver manufacturers are as excited as he is about Dolby's new cinema sound format, Atmos

It appears channels are no longer important in cinema sound, it's the objects that count. That is probably just as well because Dolby's own demo of its new surround sound format Atmos suggested the optimum number of speakers is 164 with at least 40 of them on the ceiling. I can see the owner of my local speaker emporium rubbing his hands together already.

To get your noodle around Atmos you have to think of the sound not divided into channels but as individual objects located at points in three-dimensional space. Each of the 128 objects that Atmos can output at any one time is created by acoustic processing that itself takes into account how many speaker channels are installed. Atmos can render the soundfield across as few as 10 speakers and a maximum of 64 simultaneous individual channels, formatted as 6.2.2, with multiple speakers per channel in some areas. The more, the merrier! Well, the more speakers, the more accurate the spatial rendering, in fact.

Dolby's object-based processing is not alone or even the first format to suggest this method of creating a 3D soundfield. There are at least three other systems competing for 'sound processing of choice' to accompany the new wave of 4K digital cinemas. But does it work? Apparently it does. I'm yet to clap ears on Dolby's Atmos but if other people's experiences are anything to go by, including the phrase 'multiple eargasm' in one report, then objects are in and channels are out.

So how is that going to affect home cinema? **Right now, Dolby has no plans for licensing any domestic version of this technology**, no film companies have indicated a desire to incorporate Atmos on domestic releases and many pundits are saying this is purely a commercial audio format. They are quite, quite wrong.

History has shown us that almost every innovation developed for commercial cinemas,

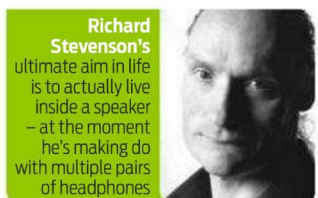
from the original Dolby Surround format to 3D video, will sooner or later make it into the living room. Moreover, as Atmos is entirely scalable and can be made to work with a minimum of 10 speakers, it could be implemented by adding a couple of in-ceiling speakers to a standard 7.1 set-up. Assuming your Atmos-enabled processor has enough output channels, then adding more amplified speakers in the room would result in more precise object location. Data capacity of Blu-ray discs might be one issue but as we are still trying to work out how to get native 4K to the home, I am sure a few more Mbps for an Atmos core data stream isn't going to be a major issue.

AVR arms race

Yet Atmos won't come to the home by consumer demand. Oh no. There certainly isn't any mass market appetite for more speakers. It's difficult enough for most red-blooded home cinema enthusiasts to get five speakers and a sub approved by the other half. It won't be driven by the studios, either, because the last thing they need is to add another layer of complexity and cost to consumer movies. What will drive Atmos into the home is the juicy specification race in which almost all AVR and processor makers are inextricably locked. They add features to ensure they are competitive on paper – often to the detriment of the sound because the cash could have otherwise been spent on better components. All the major AVR makers include seven channels of amplification, knowing full well most of their customers won't actually bother with 7.1 speakers.

Still, we must rejoice in this slightly warped commercial strategy. It gives us the tools and framework from which to experiment, often to a near maniacal degree, in the pursuit of home cinema perfection. Bring it on! ●

Do you want to add more speakers to your cinema system? Let us know via letters@homecinemachoice.com



Richard Stevenson's ultimate aim in life is to actually live inside a speaker – at the moment he's making do with multiple pairs of headphones

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